

Warriors, Queens, and Intellectuals

36 Great Women before 1400

Course Guidebook

Professor Joyce E. Salisbury
University of Wisconsin–Green Bay



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Professor Salisbury's other Great Course is *The History of Spain: Land on a Crossroad*. ■

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WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS

36 Great Women before 1400

This is a course on premodern history from about the year 1 to about 1400, but it is history told with a twist: It describes major events and ideas through the experience of women who lived through these times. Although you may be familiar with some of this history, you will see it in a new way through the lens of women's lives and writings.

Arranged chronologically, the course covers a long period of time, beginning in the West with the establishment of the Roman Empire in 27 BCE and ending at the close of the Middle Ages in about 1453 with the dawn of the Renaissance. This chronology frames a traditional division of history, but the lectures are not limited to the West. By following a global history, this course will trace similarities and differences in the way women in all these cultures made an impact on their world.

The global history of this time period reveals a number of important themes. First, this was an era of the rise and fall of great empires. Lectures follow the course of the Roman Empire through influential empresses like Poppaea and Julia Maesa. Rome's rule generated warrior women like Boudicca and Zenobia who fought against its expansion, and lectures follow their fortunes as well as the fortunes of the empire itself.

In the East, the Han empire in China expanded, stimulating the Vietnamese Trưng sisters to lead a rebellion in the year 40 against the Chinese expansion. The Han dynasty eventually gave way to the influential Tang dynasty, which came to be ruled in the 7th century by the astonishing empress Wu Zetian, who ruled China with an iron hand. Other empires also expanded during this time: the Byzantine Empire, the Delhi sultanate in India, the Japanese empire, the Muslim caliphate, and—largest of all—the Mongol empire.

The experiences of women in these growing empires reveal some surprising patterns. For example, as men established empires, they began to control women's sexuality. This was true in Rome, China, and Japan. Julia, Emperor Caesar Augustus's daughter, discovered this to her detriment and her father's despair, but it was also true for the Trưng sisters of Vietnam and Abutsu-ni of Japan. As you will discover, politics is personal inside the households of empires and tribes.

This course covers much more than political events. The time period also brought about significant religious changes. The start of Christianity coincides with the beginning of the Roman Empire, and women like Helena and Pulcheria shaped the direction of the religion. In the 7th century, Islam began, and Muslim women like Muhammad's wife Aisha left their mark on the growth of the new religion. By the 11th century, Islam and Christianity came into conflict in the bloody wars of the Crusades, and lectures show Queen Eleanor riding east, leading crusader armies, as a Byzantine princess Anna Comnena writes a significant history of a Crusade.

Islam and Christianity spread eastward to Asia, where men and women alike wrestled to accommodate new religious ideas with ancient religions. For example, one lecture explores how a 13th-century woman sultan in India negotiated the relationship between Hindus and Muslims—a problem that still plagues borders of India and Pakistan. In the East, the spread of Buddhism and Confucianism brought changes to venerable cultures in China and Japan.

Confucian notions of hierarchy restricted women's freedom, and some lectures show how women responded. In all these religions, some women expressed a deep, personal spirituality, and some lectures explore the religious writings of women, from Perpetua of Carthage to Brigitta of Sweden and to Abutsu of Japan.

The great Mongol empire, which in the 13th century stretched from Russia to China, was the most effective in dealing with religious controversies, bringing an example of religious toleration that perhaps influenced the modern world. Genghis Khan's remarkable daughter-in-law Sorkhakhtani was instrumental in implementing this religious toleration.

In addition to political and religious changes, the millennium and a half covered by this course also witnesses dramatic intellectual movements. Lectures explore the writings of many women who contributed to this burgeoning intellectual production, including the scientist Hypatia, who was killed for her skills; the nun Hildegard of Bingen, who wrote medical treatises; and the Muslim Lubna of Córdoba, who taught new mathematics.

The history of the premodern world from the year 1 to 1400 was transformative. Empires rose and fell; religions grew and expanded, leading to both great spiritual awakening and violent conflict. New ideas came to the fore in spirituality, science, philosophy, and love, and these ideas continue to influence the modern world. This course shows how women—warriors, queens, and intellectuals—were part of this complex tapestry of history. The course also shows that history is seamless: There is not a men's history or a women's history, not "his story" or "her story." This is our story. ■

JULIA DISOBEYS EMPEROR AUGUSTUS

LECTURE 1

The first Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, had only one daughter, Julia the Elder. As he tried to craft an empire centered on family ties, he ran into trouble with her. Julia wanted personal sovereignty to control her own life, while her father passed laws that restricted the choices of women and families. Her story helps illuminate the struggles of ancient women for the next centuries.





JULIA THE ELDER

In 27 BCE, the Roman Empire was born. Octavian, the adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar, had defeated his opponents in a civil war and declared himself *princeps civitatis* (meaning “first citizen”) of Rome. In 27 BCE, the Senate granted him the title *augustus* (meaning “great” or “venerable”), and a new order was born. Augustus called it the Principate, but historians ever since have called it the Roman Empire.

Now Rome was administered by one man, and for the next 400 years, the Roman Empire ruled the Mediterranean world and, in turn, was ruled by an emperor. Augustus invented the structure of the new empire as he went along, and he ruled long enough—41 years—that by the end, few people could recall any other system.



Julius Caesar

Augustus was a careful, conservative man who organized society in ways that he believed were appropriate. He believed Rome would prosper if it returned to what he believed were family values of the republic. He recalled (or imagined) a time when fathers ruled households with modest, quiet wives who bore many children.

Augustus first married a woman named Scribonia, who quickly bore him a daughter—Julia, the subject of this lecture. Shortly afterward, Augustus divorced Scribonia and then married Livia, who was the perfect modest wife for him, though she did not bear him children. Livia raised Julia to be an equally modest girl, with mixed success.

As the only child of the most important man in Rome, Julia's life was not her own. She was taught to spend her days spinning and weaving and to never say anything even in private that couldn't be expressed publicly.

There was only one role for Julia: to provide an heir to succeed Augustus. And Augustus would choose whom she would marry. His motives were strictly political, but for him, there was no difference between politics and family.

In 25 BCE, when Julia was 14 years old, Augustus gave Julia in marriage to Marcus Claudius Marcellus, the son of his sister Octavia. While Julia's young age seems odd to us, Roman girls married between the ages of 12 and 14, and some were even married before puberty.

Marcellus was an engaging young man, and no doubt Augustus saw him as a suitable heir. The sources don't tell us what Julia thought of him. They were married for 2 years and produced no children before disaster struck: An epidemic swept through Rome, and Marcellus fell ill and died. Julia was returned to her father's house.

Within a few years, Augustus arranged for Julia to marry his right-hand man: the immensely capable Agrippa, who had fought with Augustus during the civil wars and was instrumental in bringing him to power. Again, we don't know what Julia thought of him, but the marriage was supremely successful in Augustus's opinion. They produced five children: three sons—Gaius Caesar, Lucius Caesar, and Agrippa—and two daughters—Julia the Younger and Agrippina.

Once the Roman Empire had been founded, it dominated the Mediterranean world for the next 400 years, and it established a rule by dynasties, unlike the republic that preceded it.

As rulers everywhere began to establish empires that united and transcended tribal societies, they began to impose new controls on women—and on their sexual freedom. One reason for such regulation was to guarantee the ruling bloodlines, but rulers also believed that controlled households created highly regulated societies for taxation, laws, and similar structures.

Tragically, in 12 BCE, Julia's husband Agrippa died suddenly, and Julia was pregnant with her youngest son. The baby was named Agrippa Postumus, indicating that his father was dead when he was born.

Despite this tragedy, it seemed that the succession was assured. Augustus formally adopted Gaius Caesar and Lucius Caesar as his official sons, so they were next in line to rule. With these domestic arrangements in order, Augustus turned to moral legislation.

*Agrippa*

MORAL LEGISLATION

Between 19 and 18 BCE, Augustus introduced bills in the Senate to regulate public morality. These are called the Julian laws, named for Augustus's family, the Julii. These laws weren't universally supported even in his day. Augustus believed that the basis of a well-ordered state was the family, so these laws regulated family life, and they moved such regulation from families—who used to control moral lapses—to the state, where the penalties were criminal.

Of course, the core of family life was marriage, and Augustus wanted to make sure everyone married. The law stated that all men between the ages of 25 and 60 had to be married. The same was true for all women between 20 and 50.

These laws were not about sex when it came to men. Men always had available slaves and prostitutes to satisfy them. Even the serious family man Augustus took many mistresses. The problem wasn't sex—it was ties of family obligations that Augustus wanted men to assume. It was about property responsibilities, in-laws, political ties, and producing legitimate children. This last responsibility brought its own set of laws.

Rome suffered from reduced population, especially among the senatorial families. We are not sure of all the factors that contributed to this problem, but Romans believed that senatorial families chose to limit their children. Augustus tried to legislate for this by encouraging women to choose to bear more children. The emperor said that any noblewoman who bore three children and any freedwoman who bore four would be emancipated from their husband's control. This meant that she could manage her own property and control her own money. Also, fathers who sired more than three children could advance more rapidly through their public career paths.

Written texts skew the evidence regarding women from the past, because most (but not all) of the writers were men, and for them to record the lives of women, the women had to be unique—sometimes uniquely powerful, smart, talented, or vicious. That means there were millions of anonymous women who lived their lives, worked hard, supported their families, and died largely forgotten.

This law did not offer any great advantage for men; they were going to have a public career anyway. For women, however, the gain was dramatic. This legislation was written to encourage women to bear children, and it presupposes two things: that women wanted to be emancipated from men's control and that women were using birth control methods to reduce their fecundity. It turns out that Augustus was correct on both accounts.

But while Augustus was right that women tried to control their fecundity, he was wrong to think that his laws would change that. Nevertheless, he continued his legislation on morality.

Throughout the Roman period, women could—and did—inherit property. As noble families grew wealthy, so did daughters. There are many instances of wealthy women controlling large sums of money, and Roman legislators tried to restrict how many jewels they could buy or how they should spend their money.

He assumed, perhaps correctly, that women would practice birth control when they were involved in adultery. Therefore, he issued a series of strict laws against fornication.

Augustus declared adultery a public offense only for women, and it specifically targeted high-born women with property at stake. Fathers wanted to make sure the children from their wives' wombs shared their blood. If a nobleman committed adultery with a noblewoman, both were punished. If convicted, the woman lost half her dowry, and the man was fined a portion of his property. Then, both were exiled to separate places to live forever apart.

This law was about preserving marriage and parental ties. It wasn't about sex. Sexual intercourse fell under Augustus's laws of *stuprum*, or criminal fornication. Under these laws, men could not have intercourse with unmarried or widowed upper-class women. (Married women fell under the laws of adultery.) Beyond that, a man could fornicate all he liked with lower-class women (married or not), slaves, and prostitutes.

Augustus passed all this legislation while his daughter Julia was suitably married and producing heirs. But things did not continue so smoothly. Father and daughter clashed over issues of freedom and morality, and the family was torn apart.

TROUBLE AT HOME

When Julia's husband Agrippa died, Augustus's two favored grandsons—Gaius Caesar and Lucius Caesar—were still too young to rule. Augustus wanted to ensure a smooth succession in his family, so he decided that Julia must marry again. Besides, Augustus's own laws required widows to remarry, so he left Julia no choice.

Augustus selected Tiberius, his stepson from Livia's first marriage. Augustus forced Tiberius to divorce his wife and marry Julia. In return, Tiberius would be Augustus's designated heir until his two grandsons came of age.

Julia and Tiberius couldn't stand each other, but they dutifully followed the emperor's command. Julia got pregnant, but had a miscarriage—or was it an abortion? The sources written by men don't know, and the women said nothing. After this, however, the marriage was over, though not in the eyes of the law. Tiberius withdrew from public life and moved to the island of Rhodes, where he lived in seclusion until he became emperor in 14 CE.



Tiberius

Under the Julian laws, Julia had produced more than three children, so she was free of male control. The sources say that Julia expressed her freedom with parties and free love. She took lovers from among Rome's nobility, and later sources increase the scandal by saying she sold herself as a prostitute.

There would have been plenty of men who would have welcomed a path to power through the daughter who carried the bloodline of Augustus, and future women used such paths to power. Even Augustus claimed his daughter had been plotting against his life, and he executed some of her lovers. This road to power didn't work for Julia, and the sources are ruthless in their description of her actions.

Finally, in 2 BCE, informers brought enough word of Julia's scandalous behavior to Augustus for him to invoke his strict Julian laws.

The Roman historian Suetonius writes that the emperor was devastated by the news of Julia's infidelities and exiled her to the island of Pandateria (modern-day Ventotene), which lies about 30 miles west of the Gulf of Naples.

Julia's aged mother, Scribonia, joined her daughter in exile, but Augustus strictly controlled who could visit the island. The sources—favorable to the emperor—preserve the idea that Augustus was only interested in his daughter's morality, writing that Augustus would allow only ugly men on the island. But political overtones slip into the narrative. Suetonius writes that Augustus broke up a plot to rescue Julia from the island, and he executed a number of the conspirators.

Augustus's wrath extended to some of Julia's children, as well. The emperor heard that Julia's daughter, Julia the Younger, had engaged in licentious behavior, and he exiled her, too. The emperor also disapproved of his daughter's youngest son, Agrippa Postumus, who was exiled to another island and placed under guard.

Because both of Augustus's favored grandsons—Gaius and Lucius Caesar—died honorably in battle, there was no one left to inherit his throne but his stepson, Julia's husband Tiberius.

Julia remained in exile on the island for five years while Romans, who had always admired her wit and good-hearted demeanor, begged Augustus to relent and release her. The emperor was always solicitous of public opinion, so he allowed her to be brought to the mainland, to Rhêgium (modern-day Reggio di Calabria) in southern Italy, where she was permitted more amenities, but her movements remained restricted.

The new imperial laws on women and sexuality fell hard on the popular, rebellious daughter of Augustus, and she has been largely forgotten by male historians through the centuries. But the constraints she faced and her struggles against them were confronted by women across time, even if they hadn't heard of her.

Augustus was never reconciled with his family. On his deathbed, he insisted that neither Julia nor her daughter be buried in his mausoleum. Once Augustus died and Tiberius became emperor, Julia's lot was not improved. Tiberius cut the allowance Augustus had allowed Julia and confined her to house arrest with no resources. Some sources report that she starved to death in exile in 14 CE, shortly after Tiberius took power.

Readings

Balsdon, *Roman Women*.

Elson, *Julia*.

Fantham, *Julia Augusti*.

Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*.

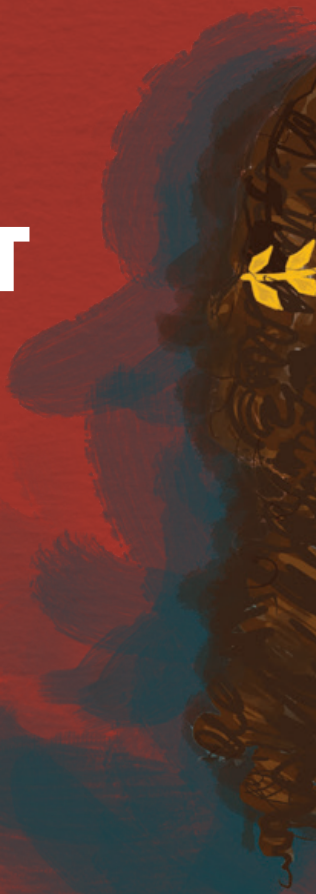
Questions

- 1 Why did Augustus emphasize legislation on family, sexuality, and women's lives? What laws do you find particularly surprising? Why?
- 2 How did some women, including Julia, respond to the legislation? How did some men try to avoid the legislation?
- 3 Why did Augustus insist that his granddaughter Julia the Younger kill her infant? Was this inconsistent with his family laws?
- 4 What made women's personal lives so political?

HERODIAS HAS JOHN THE BAPTIST BEHEADED

LECTURE 2

In 4 BCE, the kingdom of Judea—a client kingdom of the Roman Empire—on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean faced a crisis. King Herod the Great, who had ruled for 32 years, died, and his will called for his prosperous lands to be divided among three of his sons: Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip. The Roman emperor Caesar Augustus confirmed this decision, and the lands were divided. Antipas, who controlled portions of the central lands, Galilee and Perea, married Herodias, whose ambition and drive placed her at the center of the controversies in Judea and who would later be reviled by Christians.





RELATIONS WITH ROME

Herod the Great had kept good relations with Rome by guarding the borders of his land and ruthlessly repressing any dissension within his kingdom. Herod is remembered as a great builder of Israel. He completely rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem, transforming it into a glorious building. He also built the fortress of Masada and other great cities in Judea.

Herod was a shrewd enough politician to walk a very fine line between pleasing Rome and his subjects, who hated being ruled by the pagan outsiders. He is also remembered as a murderer and a madman. He took 10 wives—the last two of whom were his own nieces—and killed many of his family members. As soon as he took power, he put to death 45 members of the Sanhedrin, the supreme council of the Jews that had religious and legal jurisdiction. Herod replaced the dead with his own supporters, ending any critique of his reign.

Herod was a hard act to follow for his sons, including Antipas. The new tetrarch—a word implying rule by four men, even though there were only three of them—had to repeatedly go to Rome to consult with the emperor, and apparently he made a good impression.



Herod

Antipas is also known as Herod Antipas and Herod the Tetrarch, and the Christian Gospels simply call him Herod.

About a decade after Herod's kingdom had been divided among the sons, the Romans deposed Antipas's brother Archelaus and made that section of Judea a Roman province instead of a client kingdom. This brought the city of Jerusalem directly under Roman control, governed by a provincial governor.

One of the ways Antipas looked to cultivate his Roman masters was by continuing his father's building program. Antipas built a new capital city on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. He called the city Tiberias, in honor of the new emperor who succeeded Caesar Augustus and on whose goodwill Antipas depended.

Today, Tiberias is considered one of Judaism's four holiest cities, along with Jerusalem, Hebron, and Safed.

Antipas also made sure to cultivate the Romans by making periodic visits to Rome. On one of his trips, Antipas stayed with his half brother, Herod II, and his wife Herodias, who was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. Herodias and Herod II had a young daughter named Salome.

According to Josephus, Antipas fell in love with Herodias and "ventured to talk to her about a marriage between them." She agreed to go with him but set conditions. First, each had to divorce their current spouses. There was no political downside for Herodias to leave Herod II, but Antipas was married to the daughter of a powerful Arabian king. Nevertheless, Antipas agreed, and Herodias went to him as soon as he returned home from Rome. The exact date of their marriage is uncertain, but it must have taken place sometime between 15 and 26 CE.

Most of the written material regarding Herodias and Judea in the early 1st century comes from two sources: the Gospels in the Bible's New Testament and a history roughly contemporary with the Gospel accounts that was written by the Romano-Jewish scholar Titus Flavius Josephus.

Antipas had originally married Phasaelis, the daughter of King Aretas of Nabatea, on the eastern border of Antipas's lands. Phasaelis heard of her husband's betrayal and quickly fled to her father's kingdom to avoid being murdered instead of divorced. Once she was safely there, King Aretas went to war against Antipas.

The tetrarch paid a heavy price for Antipas's marriage to Herodias, for Antipas's army was destroyed in the war. The king had to send to Rome for help, and Tiberius, who was now emperor, had to send a Roman army to defeat Aretas. This did not endear Antipas to the Romans, so he had damaged this important political tie.

This marriage led Antipas directly into a confrontation with how to reconcile a Jewish ruler's actions with Jewish law. All the rulers in the ancient world treated marriage alliances as a political matter, changing spouses with ease. However, Jewish law had a different interpretation of marriage.

There was a strict prohibition against a woman leaving a living husband to marry another man, and this was particularly true when there was a child involved. It was also prohibited for a woman to marry her husband's brother. These rules were designed to ensure harmony among ancient families, and Herodias and Antipas broke them.

Historians have accused Herodias of being ambitious (she was) and of looking for a more exciting life outside of Rome (she did). Antipas seemed to provide this opportunity, and Herodias took it.

In the early 1st century, Judea was plagued by three intersecting problems: relations with the Roman overlords, the negotiation of degrees of Jewish orthodoxy (that is, in this multicultural world of the Roman Empire, how strictly must Jews in Judea follow scriptural restrictions), and the many struggles within Judaism itself as competing sects vied for the soul of the religion.

As Judea's Jews began to criticize Herodias for this marriage, the couple confronted the growth of reform movements within Judaism itself.

Herodias was married at an early age to her uncle, Herod II. The Gospels of Matthew and Mark incorrectly say that she was first married to a man named Philip.

REFORM MOVEMENTS WITHIN JUDAISM

Josephus first writes of the four major groups competing within Judaism, and the first two are also described in the Gospels.

- ◆ The Sadducees, who emphasized worship at the great temple as the ideal of Judaism, were willing to allow exceptions in the law so long as worship at the temple was maintained.
- ◆ The Pharisees, on the other hand, who emphasized Jewish purity laws, refused all compromise with the Roman world and adhered strictly to dietary rules and rituals to reinforce their separateness from all non-Jews.
- ◆ There were also the Essenes, who withdrew to the desert to live in communities like Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. These Jews believed there was no way to compromise with the ruling power of Rome, so they left.
- ◆ Then there were the Zealots, a political group who wanted to overthrow the power of Rome and introduce a free Jewish state.

As if this weren't enough conflict, there were also a number of individual prophets who spoke out and appealed to people's faith. Two of the most famous were born in the reign of Caesar Augustus. Just as this first emperor was establishing the Roman Empire and regulating family life, the infant

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and his cousin John had been born a few months earlier near Jerusalem. By the time these two men were grown and beginning their missions, Antipas and his wife Herodias were ruling, and their lives intersected with violent consequences.

John was the first to come to the attention of the authorities. A preacher in the model of the Essenes, he lived in the wilderness and rejected the trappings of the civilized Roman world that had taken over Judea. Both the Gospels and Josephus agree that his message was one of redemption; he baptized people in the River Jordan—on the border of Antipas's kingdom—and promised that through this washing, people's sins would be cleansed. He was hugely popular and became known as John the Baptizer—remembered as John the Baptist.

According to the Gospels (Mark 6:18), John criticized Antipas by saying, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." This criticism enraged Herodias, and she wanted to kill the prophet for turning people against her.

There are two differing accounts about what happened next.

In the lesser-known account, Josephus writes that Antipas was afraid of John's growing popularity. John's influence might allow him to lead the people in a rebellion, for it seemed to Antipas that the people were ready to do anything the prophet wanted. It appears that the tetrarch was afraid John might be a Zealot, inciting people to rise against Rome and its puppet—Antipas himself. So, Antipas had John arrested and put to death.

The biblical account is more detailed, and it makes Herodias the villain in the killing. This account agrees with Josephus that Antipas was afraid of John. However, Antipas did not want to kill the holy man, even though he was troubled by the prophet's attack on his marriage. Antipas had John arrested while he decided what to do. Herodias, however, made a plan to force Antipas to kill John.

On the tetrarch's birthday, Herodias planned a great banquet to celebrate and called for her daughter Salome, who was about 15 years old, to dance for the king. Antipas was so pleased with her dance that he said, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will grant it." The reckless, drunken vow was made in front of everyone, so the king could not withdraw his promise.

Salome consulted with her mother, who recommended requesting "the head of John the Baptist." Salome went quickly to the king, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

The king was very sorry, for he did not want to kill John, but he did not want to break his oath. Immediately, he sent for a soldier and ordered him to bring John's head. The soldier beheaded John and brought his head on a platter and gave it to Salome, who presented it to her mother. Herodias was very pleased.

This biblical account of John's beheading became the most famous one. From then on, Herodias and Salome have remained archetypal evil women.

Herodias thought that the killing of John the Baptist would simply eliminate a critic, but instead this act became one of the rallying events for early Christians.



Antipas's rule did not quiet the province of Judea, and Herodias's killing of John did not quell the dissent. Roman armies marched into Judea three decades after Antipas's rule and destroyed Jerusalem, the temple, and other great Jewish cities.

HERODIAS'S FATAL AMBITION

In 37, Antipas's patron, Emperor Tiberius, died, and the throne fell to Caligula. With the change in power in Rome came a change in power in Judea, and Herodias wasn't happy about it.

Years before, Herodias's brother Agrippa had fled to Rome and became friends with Caligula. And now the new emperor rewarded his friend. Agrippa was given the tetrarchies that had once belonged to Philip and Archelaus. In addition, the emperor awarded Agrippa the title *king* instead of just *tetrarch*. When Agrippa returned to Judea, parading in the trappings of a king with a title superior to that of Antipas, Herodias grew furious with envy.



Caligula

According to Josephus, Herodias was so envious that she repeatedly urged her husband to go to Rome and acquire the titles of *king* and *queen* for them so that they would be equal to her brother Agrippa.

Antipas was opposed to her request, but eventually he gave in. The two traveled to Rome with all the royal trappings they could muster and planned to appeal to Caligula. But Agrippa heard of their plans and also prepared to go to Rome to make sure his status didn't change. He made his own plans to sabotage his sister's pleas by sending Caligula letters accusing Antipas of treason.

The emperor believed his friend Agrippa, and Antipas lost everything. Caligula took away his tetrarchy and gave it to Agrippa, uniting Judea once again. Caligula also gave Agrippa all of Antipas's money, leaving the tetrarch to live in modest circumstances the rest of his life. Antipas was exiled to the city of Lugdunum (modern-day Lyon) in Gaul.

Caligula offered Herodias a way out of this exile. The emperor recognized that she was Agrippa's sister and told her Agrippa had intervened on her behalf. Caligula offered to let her keep her money and return wealthy to her brother's lands in Judea. In an act that seems uncharacteristic of this ambitious woman, Herodias turned down the emperor's offer.

Caligula was furious at her response and sent her to Gaul with Antipas. They both died in obscurity in exile, perhaps in about 39 CE.

Readings

Hockner, *Herod Antipas*.
Josephus, *Josephus*.
Kokkinos, *The Herodian Dynasty*.

Questions

- 1 How did Herodias and Antipas marry? Why did their marriage create difficulties with the orthodox Jews in the kingdom?
- 2 What were the competing sects within Judaism in the 1st century? How did these disagreements contribute to Herodias's problems?
- 3 Why did Herodias want John the Baptist killed? What was Antipas's role in the crucifixion of Jesus?
- 4 What was Herodias's role in Antipas's downfall? Were you surprised at Herodias's loyalty to him at the end of his life?

THE TRUNG SISTERS OF VIETNAM FIGHT THE HAN

LECTURE 3

While in the West the new Roman Empire was expanding, in the East another great empire—the Chinese Han—was also spreading. Just like in the West, the Han empire came into conflict with tribal people as it expanded, imposed new rules about family life, and stimulated rebellions. In the East, two sisters rebelled against the powerful Han empire and became symbols of freedom for the people of Vietnam.





THE RED RIVER DELTA

The Red River rises in China and rushes along for about 750 miles down through mountain gorges before it spreads into the delta. This triangular region of about 5,000 square miles contains rich lowlands as the river system empties into the Gulf of Tonkin near Hanoi.

This region had been ruled by legendary kings in the Hung dynasty, who had ruled from about 2800 BCE. The kings lived at the borders of the lowland delta and the neighboring hills so that they could control both regions.

The villagers in the delta prospered because of the rich rice fields that they irrigated from the rising waters of the Red River. The people were called the Lac by the Chinese, and the name refers to the Vietnamese way of irrigating their rice fields.

The villages also grew rich on trade that extended north to China and south to the Mekong delta and beyond. In addition to their abundant rice, the Vietnamese traded their natural resources, such as copper, iron, gold, silver, and jade.

The Lac tribes learned to cast bronze in about 1000 BCE. Today, archaeologists call this Bronze Age in Vietnam the Dong Son culture. Their most striking artifact was a bronze drum that they cast and decorated beautifully. The drums sounded the heartbeat of the villages and clans that spread throughout the delta and the neighboring highlands. They were played for feasts and funerals, and they called the clan's warriors together for war.

The sources of information on Trung Trac and her sister Trung Nhi are few, and the contemporary texts were written by the Chinese. Because of this, we generally know what they did, but who they were as women remains elusive.

Trung Trac and Trung Nhi were related to the legendary Hung kings on their maternal side.

SOCIAL LIFE IN VIETNAM

Traditional Viet society was based on clans, not on nuclear families, and within these clans, women carried a great deal of sovereignty. In fact, some anthropologists consider the Dong Son culture to be matriarchal, with a child's mother being much more important than ties of paternity.

Young women were free to choose lovers at spring festivals, and if a girl became pregnant during these events, the young man was to go to her clan, marry her, and be accepted as a son-in-law. If she did not get pregnant, she was free to choose another young man.

Mothers were responsible for raising the children. This responsibility extended into adulthood, and women and grandmothers were regularly consulted about the plans and fortunes of the clan.

A CLASH OF CULTURES

In 111 BC, the Han dynasty of the Chinese expanded southward and conquered most of North Vietnam. The Chinese ruled the rich Red River delta province as well as the two regions north and south of the delta, so they controlled the whole Gulf of Tonkin.



For more than a century, the Chinese rule rested lightly on the land of the Lac. The clan system remained in place, and women continued to wield a good deal of authority. The drums still sounded through the hills, and clans gathered together to celebrate and sometimes fight among each other.

The Chinese influence was felt most strongly in the prosperity that grew as trade from the Han empire extended all the way to the West, connecting to the Roman Empire across the famous Silk Road. The Chinese presence showed in garrisons placed in the provinces, but they were only a token force. However, in 25 CE, events far to the north in the Han empire created changes that would affect the provinces far to the south in Vietnam.

In the north, a brief revolution that overthrew the Han emperor for about 16 years caused a backlash that rippled down into the delta, changing the status quo. The Han empire that had been established in 206 BCE experienced a brief lapse in rule when a rebellion introduced a new dynasty, the Xin. This dynasty lasted only from 9 CE to 23 CE and was ruled by only one emperor. The newly restored Han dynasty is called the Eastern Han because the emperors moved the capital from Chang'an east to Luoyang. This Eastern Han empire continued another 200 years until 220 CE.

The new victorious Han emperor took the name Guangwudi when he took the throne, and he ruled until 57 CE—a long reign, which gave him plenty of time to implement changes that he was sure would ensure the success of the Han dynasty and avoid future rebellions. Under Guangwudi, the light rule of the Han in Vietnam changed.



Guangwudi

Like many emperors before and since, Guangwudi needed money to replace the losses from the war and to finance his new city. So, he raised taxes all over the empire. To implement these new taxes in Vietnam, he sent a new governor to the south. He chose a man named Jen Yen to serve as prefect to Vietnam.

Jen Yen made some radical changes to life in Vietnam. He brought iron, and with the introduction of iron farming tools, he increased production. The Iron Age began in Vietnam at about this time.

While the Han-dynasty emperors had begun to embrace Confucianism as part of their official policies, the philosophy was incompatible with traditional Vietnamese views on women's personal sovereignty and sexual freedom.

Confucius believed that a good society was a hierarchic society, with all content in their status and obedient to those above them. Of course, everyone was obedient to the emperor, but in this system, women were also placed in the hierarchy, and they were always to be subservient to fathers and husbands and, in their old age, their sons.

Jen Yen wanted a society based on clear family households with women subservient to men and men subservient to rulers, and he began to enforce this view of society by focusing first on marriage. He passed a law ordering all men between the ages of 20 and 50 to pick a partner and marry. All women between the ages of 15 and 40 were also to marry. He reputedly conducted a marriage ceremony for 1,000 couples. As Chinese concepts of marriage were enforced through the Lac society, traditional structures began to weaken.

Note how similar Jen Yen's marriage laws are to Caesar Augustus's laws at the beginning of the Roman Empire.

TRUNG SISTERS: SYMBOLS OF FREEDOM

About a decade after the marriage laws were imposed by the Han dynasty, a new governor was appointed to the delta region. This man was Su Ting, and according to even the Chinese sources, he was the worst kind of administrator. He was corrupt and laid ever-heavier taxes on the people.

The bronze drums began to sound in the hills, beating of their discontent with this ruler, and among the discontented were a local ruler named Thi Sach and his wife, Trung Trac.

Thi Sach vociferously complained about the treatment of the people, and he was killed for his outspoken objections.

Trung Trac decided it was time to throw off the Chinese yoke. She enlisted her sister, Trung Nhi, and they called together the local clan leaders and stirred them to fight.

Among the people Trac recruited were several women who had been entering into small skirmishes with the Chinese. The combined forces included a number of men and women generals leading their own troops but fighting together.

Trac and Nhi's mother was a widow who raised her two daughters on her own, and this was solidly within the matriarchal tradition. She taught the girls skills usual for both women and men. She had her daughters trained in the martial arts, sword fighting, and archery, and they learned to ride the war elephants that accompanied the armies through the jungles.

They began their rebellion in the spring of 39 or 40, as people gathered together to celebrate spring festivals. The drums called fighters not only from the delta, but also from the neighboring provinces, and their growing army included both men and women. According to legend—which in this case is plausible—the sisters mounted war elephants and led the armies.

At first, they had great success. The tribal armies subdued local Chinese garrisons, and the women's armies managed to take 65 cities, unifying the whole territory under their rule.

The end of the spring campaign saw these stunning victories. The people gathered together and proclaimed Trung Trac, the elder sister, queen. She began her benign rule in the year 40, establishing her capital near modern Hanoi in the rich delta. Her first act as queen was to abolish the taxes that had been imposed by the Chinese. Beyond that, legend says that she ruled "lightly," favoring trade both from the sea and through woodland trails into the highlands. Both these practices suggest she wanted to restore the customs of the native Vietnamese, as well as foster the prosperity that had always come with trade into the delta.

Emperor Guangwudi would not leave the Trung sisters in charge of these prosperous provinces in what he considered south China. In part, the problem was their gender.

In the summer of 42, the emperor appointed a general to lead the expedition from the Han capital of Luoyang to Me Linh, the capital of the Trung kingdom. He chose Ma Yuan, a famous but elderly general who had recently put down other rebellions against the Han. He had 20,000 troops at his disposal, and because there were not enough boats to transport the troops by sea, he began the 860-mile-long trek on land.

It took a year—until 43—before Ma Yuan reached the delta. The chroniclers don't record any military encounters between Ma Yuan and the Trung forces during his long march, but his forces faced poor weather and terrain conditions. His fleet admiral had died of illness along the way, and things got worse in the camp, with rain and malarial fever taking their toll.

Finally, the Trung sisters decided to engage. One source says that only the younger sister, Trung Nhi, marched down with their army to confront Ma Yuan.

The Chinese were weakened and outnumbered, but the skill of the general more than made up for these weaknesses. The discipline of the Chinese soldiers confronted chaotic charges of tribal forces, and the Vietnamese were soundly defeated. Several thousand of the Trung's troops were killed, and more than 10,000 either surrendered or were captured. The sisters fled the field.

The Trungs fled to the Cam Khe district to the west and gathered some of their remaining forces to them. It took Ma Yuan some years to follow the rebellious forces, and during that time, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi engaged the Chinese forces repeatedly. They lost every encounter and had to retreat into the hills and forests.

In the end, Ma Yuan killed both sisters. He chopped off their heads and had them sent to the emperor, in Luoyang, to prove his victory.

The Vietnamese legends offer a slightly different ending to the story than this version from Chinese sources. They write, "When they reached the dead end in Cam Khe/The two sisters in despair had to drown themselves in the Hat River." This is a more heroic end: The sisters weren't killed but chose to sacrifice themselves for the cause of Vietnamese independence. This becomes the prevailing legend, but the Chinese story seems more plausible. Ma Yuan had pursued them too long to let them die in peace.

The death of the Trung sisters did not end the rebellion. Ma Yuan took 2,000 boats and 20,000 more soldiers to pursue the remnants of Trung Trac's army. Over the course of a few years, he killed, decapitated, and arrested more than 5,000 soldiers.

Ma Yuan also wanted to convert the region to a fully Chinese province. To achieve this goal, he confiscated the great bronze drums that had echoed through the region. This act both attacked the identity of clans of the region and cut off their means of summoning each other to battle.

Once Ma Yuan had pacified the region, the Chinese garrisons were once more installed, and taxes continued to be collected and sent north to China. The noble children of Vietnam began to go to Chinese schools, where they studied Confucian texts. Slowly, old ideas of matriarchy and tribal society began to give way to hierarchy and patriarchy. This was Ma Yuan's real victory.

This could have been the end of the story of the rebellion of the Trung sisters, who ruled for only a few years, but instead, they became among the most important women in Vietnamese history. They became symbols of freedom.

In various wars against invaders, the Trung sisters were invoked as the patience of the Vietnamese people to struggle for independence, and the sisters inspired women to participate in the wars.

Readings

Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires, Qin and Han*.

Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*.

——, *The Birth of Vietnam*.

Vo and Bich, *The Trung Sisters Revisited*.

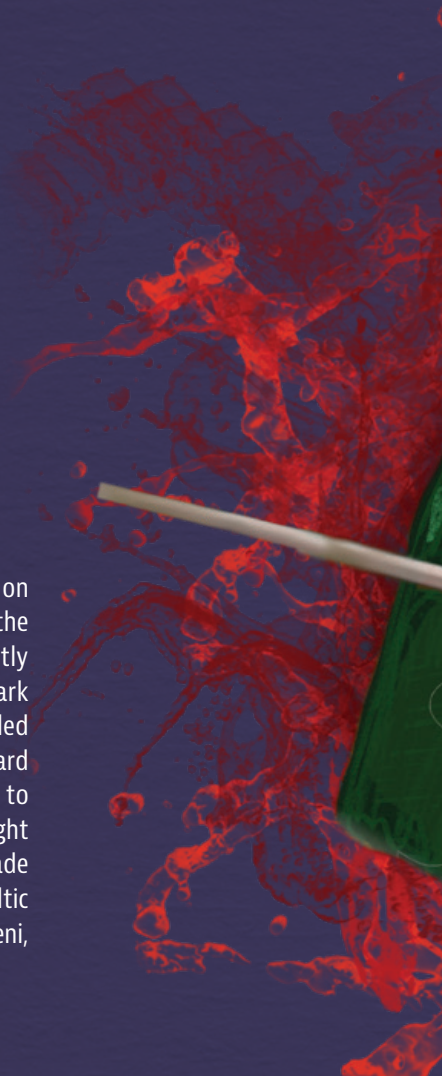
Questions

- 1 What was the role of women in traditional Vietnamese culture, and how did this come into conflict with the expanding Han Chinese empire?
- 2 What caused the Han emperor to impose new taxes and restrictions on the Vietnamese? How did Confucianism contribute to the tensions in Vietnam?
- 3 How are the Trung sisters influential into the modern era? Is the memory of an event more influential than the event itself?

BOUDICCA ATTACKS THE ROMANS

LECTURE 4

In the year 60, there were many tribes on the island of Britain, and they divided the land into small kingdoms with constantly shifting borders. Surrounded by great dark forests, tribes settled in hill forts surrounded by wooden and earthen fortifications to guard against neighboring tribes, who wanted to steal their cattle and their beautifully wrought gold and silver jewelry. The tribes were made up of Celts and local Britons and spoke Celtic languages. Boudicca was the queen of the Iceni, one of these tribal kingdoms.





TRIBAL LIFE VERSUS ROMAN LIFE

These tribes fought almost endless small wars with each other, seeking gold to reward warriors and glory for poets to sing about. Their war leaders used light wicker chariots pulled by small horses to ride quickly into battle, and more than 20 such chariots have been found in Iron Age burials, showing how they valued these exciting war transports.

This tribal life centered around family, the most meaningful bond in the Celtic world.

The tribes themselves were made up of clan groups and ruling families. Even warfare was a family affair, as women and children of the warriors followed bands to watch the carnage and celebrate the victories.

The people in these tribal villages lived in thatched round houses. The shape of the houses is significant, because archaeologists know that when they encounter ruins of round houses, they are seeing tribal societies, where people prized their independence; they had not yet been conquered by outsiders.



This way of life couldn't be in greater contrast to that of the Romans. The Roman Empire was huge, and it was governed by laws that transcended family life. Caesar Augustus even regulated sexual behavior and women's roles—matters the Celts left to family. Roman women stayed home. Roman battles were fought by disciplined soldiers far from home who relied on prostitutes for their needs and rape as their right of conquest.

The tribes had lived alongside the Roman Empire and grew rich on trade for years. The Iceni were particularly well placed to profit—and learn—from Rome, because they were on the coast and traded regularly with the empire. But Rome was not interested in simply trade; they wanted to control the rich mines of Britain, and as part of their inexorable expansion, they sent their armies to confront the tribes.

Roman expansion came into conflict with these tribal societies of Britain. In 43 CE, the emperor Claudius sent Rome's legions to the island, and they conquered 11 tribes of Britain, all located in the south. The conquered tribes included the Iceni.

Rome made Prasutagus, the king of the Iceni, a client king of Rome, which was supposed to offer the Iceni a measure of independence. Prasutagus's wife Boudicca shared his rule, and they had two daughters. Such client kingdoms were the kind of arrangement the Romans made with kings of the great lands in the east, and it worked quite well. However, the Romans always had disdain for these tribes, whom they called barbarians, and the notion that a king of one of these tribes would be equal to a great Persian ruler did not sit well with the Roman troops. It was only an uneasy peace that had settled on the south of the island.

Wherever Roman armies came and occupied, they established *colonia*, outposts to house soldiers and their growing service providers, such as taverns, laundries, and other stores. These *colonia* began as small outposts and grew into cities as veterans retired to them.

When the Romans entered Britain under Claudius, they established several *colonia*s, including a major one called *Camulodunum*, today's Colchester. These colonies were seldom established without exploiting the local populations.

The historian Tacitus tells us that Roman veterans “drove people out of their houses, ejected them from their farms, called them captives and slaves.” The soldiers did not intervene in the lawlessness of the veterans, because they expected to be able to behave in the same way when their time came.

The soldiers and veterans were also complacent. Instead of building a fortification around the colony as was customary, they built a temple to Emperor Claudius to celebrate their presence in Britain and increased the taxes on the local villagers to pay for it. Needless to say, the resident population grew angry at all these insults.

The Romans also took over established towns, securing them with garrisons of soldiers. One example of an occupied town was Londinium, today’s London, positioned strategically at a curve in the mighty Thames. Another strategic location was Verulamium, today’s Saint Albans, which the Romans occupied as well.



CRISIS OF THE ICENI

Thus, in 60 CE, southern Britain was a patchwork of tribes trying to negotiate a small group of invaders who had established themselves on the island. In that year, the wealthy Iceni faced a crisis: Their king, Prasutagus, client king of Rome, died. He was survived by his wife Boudicca and two daughters. In his will, Prasutagus divided his considerable fortune in half, leaving half to the Roman emperor Nero and half to his two daughters. According to the Roman historian Tacitus, the dying king thought that "this token of submission would put his kingdom and his house out of the reach of wrong." But the king misjudged his status with Rome.

The soldiers treated the death of the king as the end of the contract with Rome and treated the household of the king as spoils of war. They broke into his palace and plundered it. They whipped Queen Boudicca and raped her young daughters. The chief men of the Iceni were stripped of their possessions, and the king's relatives were made slaves. Britain was slowly being reduced from a land of client kings to an occupied province.

The Roman historian Dio Cassius described how Queen Boudicca responded. She stirred her people, calling on them to prefer freedom over slavery and reminding them how much they had suffered under Roman occupation. She was ready to avenge her daughters' rape and her own whipping.

According to Dio, Boudicca mounted her wicker chariot and led an initial army of about 120,000 (probably exaggerated). The queen decided first to turn to the hated colonia of Camulodunum (Colchester).

The residents expected an attack, and they looked to Roman generals for support. The governor of the province, Suetonius Paulinus, was putting down a rebellion in the west of the island and could not arrive in time. The procurator sent a mere 200 men to help guard the city. It would not be enough.

Boudicca swept down on the town, leading the troops on her chariot. They surrounded the town, plundered it, and set fire to the wooden buildings. The Roman soldiers retreated to the stone temple, where they held out for two more days. Eventually, Boudicca's army stormed the stone temple and killed all the soldiers. Camulodunum fell easily, and more people rallied to Boudicca's standard.



As Boudicca's army left the burning city, they encountered the Roman Ninth Legion that was coming to the rescue of the city. Boudicca routed these troops and destroyed all the infantry. The general escaped with his cavalry to the safety of a walled camp. Tacitus mentions that the procurator of the province, Catus, crossed over to Gaul, leaving parts of Britain on fire with the Celtic armies led by the queen.

Rome had appointed Suetonius Paulinus as governor of the province of Britain in 58 or 59. During the beginning of Boudicca's uprising, he had been putting down rebellions in Wales.

While attacking the island of Mona—today Anglesey, off the coast of Wales—Suetonius heard about Boudicca's revolt. After destroying the army on Anglesey, he marched his battle-hardened legion along the Roman road of Watling Street about 290 miles from Anglesey to London. It was during that time that Boudicca had her stunning success at Camulodonum and in the vicinity.

WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS:
36 GREAT WOMEN BEFORE 1400

When Suetonius arrived in London, the shrewd general looked around the city, which was not a colony of Rome yet, but still a merchant town. He saw that he could not defend the unwallled town and “resolved to save the province at the cost of a single town.” Tacitus tells us he was unmoved by the pleas of the residents for protection and pulled back, waiting for the right time to engage Boudicca.



Suetonius

The residents of London were right to worry. Boudicca descended with her armies and destroyed the town, burning it to the ground. The Romans were horrified that Boudicca did not adhere to what they perceived as rules of war: Her army did not take prisoners or plunder to sell. Boudicca was focused on revenge, and Tacitus says she and her army were only interested in slaughter and fire.

Once they had destroyed London, they descended on nearby Verulamium (Saint Albans) and destroyed it as well. Tacitus estimated that 70,000 inhabitants were killed in the raids on these two towns.

Tacitus wrote: “Never before or since has Britain ever been in a more disturbed and perilous state.”

These easy victories led Boudicca to make a tactical error. Her armies raided easy, unwallled towns, taking the riches they could find. They ignored forts and garrisons, allowing Suetonius all the time he needed to gather his legions and choose his battlefield. And he chose wisely.

The Romans were badly outnumbered; Suetonius had about 10,000 soldiers, and by now, Boudicca’s army had swelled. Dio Cassius says there were 230,000 Celts in her army (surely exaggerated). But Suetonius chose a location that rendered her numbers useless. He selected a position at the end of a deep ravine that had thick, impenetrable woods at his back.

His soldiers closed ranks, leaving no room for the Celts to go around and outflank him. Thus, with the narrow front line, the Celts could not use their greater numbers. Now the battle would hinge on discipline and experience, and the Romans excelled in those skills.

The Britons, with masses of infantry and cavalry, were arrayed in front of the Roman line. Given their sheer numbers, they were already counting on their victory. As was traditional in these tribal battles, they brought their wives and children in wagons to witness the expected great victory, and these wagons were arrayed in a semicircle behind the army's line. Unfortunately, this cut off any retreat.

The Romans converged in their famous *testudo* formation, with shields close together and interlocking overhead. Tacitus describes how they threw their javelins with "unerring aim on the closely approaching foe." As Boudicca's soldiers fell, their arrows and spears fell uselessly on the shields of the tightly stationed army. Once they ran out of javelins, the Romans rushed in a wedge-like column while maintaining the discipline of the wall of shields. The Celts died as they bravely tried to penetrate the wall.

The word
testudo means
"tortoise."

Tacitus describes how Boudicca's army tried to flee to fight another day, but the wagons with their families blocked their retreat from the killing field. As the dust settled, Tacitus says 80,000 Britons died, while Romans lost only 400.

In his early accounts, Tacitus didn't say what happened to Boudicca, but in a later narrative, he claimed that the queen survived the carnage and committed suicide by poison. Later traditions claimed she poisoned her two daughters as well.

Boudicca's rebellion essentially ended Iron Age Britain, and Boudicca herself was largely forgotten for a long time.

Readings

Dudley, *The Rebellion of Boudicca*.

Fraser, *The Warrior Queens*.

Scott, *Boadicea*.

Trow and Trow, *Boudicca*.

Questions

- 1 What are the most significant differences between the tribal societies of Britain and the Roman Empire?
- 2 What triggered Boudicca's rebellion? How did it end?
- 3 Why did Boudicca become popular again in the 19th century?

POPPAEA HELPS NERO PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS

LECTURE 5

In the year 54, Nero became emperor of Rome; he was the last in the Julio-Claudian dynasty, established by the first emperor, Caesar Augustus. When Augustus founded the Roman Empire more than 50 years before Nero, he thought that family ties and modest, domestic women would make society orderly. Little did he know that some women—more than a few—would ruthlessly take advantage of their position in imperial families to take and wield power. This was true of Emperor Nero's ambitious second wife, Poppaea Sabina, a woman as ruthless as he was and who helped him in his career of murder, cruelty, and extravagant power.



POPPAEA'S RISE IN ROME

Poppaea was born in about 31 and grew up in the Pompeii region in southern Italy. Her family was wealthy but from middle-class origins, and they seem to have used the wealth they amassed to rise into the noble families of Rome.

Pompeii was a beautiful, prosperous town overlooking the sparkling Bay of Naples, with the smoking Mount Vesuvius in the background. The volcano wouldn't bury the town until 48 years after Poppaea was born.

Poppaea's mother, Poppaea Sabina the Elder, had run afoul of the court in Rome. Poppaea the Elder was supposed to be the most beautiful woman in Rome, and she was accused of adultery by Emperor Claudius's wife. She committed suicide in shame. Historians speculate that the younger Poppaea learned from her mother's experience and was prepared to tackle the city of Rome with ambition and ruthlessness of her own.

Poppaea inherited her mother's beauty. In 44, when she was 13 years old—a typical age for a Roman girl to be wed—her father arranged a decent marriage for her. Her husband was Rufius Crispinus, who was much older. Poppaea bore one son to Crispinus, though Nero would have the young man killed after Poppaea's death.

Crispinus was a leader of the powerful Praetorian Guard—a special unit of soldiers that guarded the emperor—under Emperor Claudius, so Poppaea moved to Rome and came to know some of the people of the palace. Members of the Praetorian Guard received higher pay than any other soldiers, so Crispinus was an influential man in Rome when Poppaea married him. However, the Praetorian Guard was almost by definition political, with the fortunes of the guard linked to the favor of the emperor and his family.

Crispinus served Emperor Claudius until the year 51, when Claudius's new wife Agrippina had him removed; she believed the soldier was more loyal to Claudius's first wife than he was to her. Agrippina—the mother of the next emperor, Nero—was going to make sure to be surrounded by her supporters, and she knew to start with the vital Praetorian Guard.

Once Crispinus was no longer in an influential position in Rome, Poppaea evidently lost interest in her husband. In 58, when she was 27 years old, she had her chance to advance. Tacitus wrote that she captivated Rome with her witty conversation, virtuous appearance, and lax morals.

Soon, a young senator named Marcus Salvius Otho fell in love with Poppaea. Tacitus tells us that Otho was young and fashionable, which drew Poppaea's attention, but even more importantly, he was the childhood friend of Nero, so he was well placed in the palace. Poppaea divorced Crispinus and married Otho.

Otho made the mistake of raving about the beauty and charm of his new wife when he was in the presence of his friend, Emperor Nero, who asked to meet her. Nero, who was seven years younger than Poppaea, immediately took her as his mistress and sent her husband Otho away to govern Lusitania, a distant province of the empire covering most of what is now Portugal and part of Spain.

With Otho gone, Poppaea had risen to the highest halls of power. But her position was not yet secure.



Otho

Nero already had a wife, Octavia, the daughter of Emperor Claudius and through whom the blood of Augustus flowed, giving Nero legitimacy to rule. Octavia had the title of empress and was very popular with the people of Rome. Nero, on the other hand, hated her for her virtuous, noble ways, and the feeling was mutual.

As soon as Poppaea became pregnant with Nero's child, the emperor divorced Octavia. When the people of Rome protested, he had Octavia banished to an island and then murdered. Nero had Octavia's head delivered to Poppaea—who might have seen it as an engagement gift.



Nero

The people of Rome rioted at the death of Octavia, destroying the statues of Poppaea and blaming her for the death of Octavia. Reputedly, Poppaea didn't care; she was consolidating her power over the young ruler. But she had yet another rival.

The emperor also had a mistress named Claudia Acte, who Nero kept for years as his mistress and chief confidant. She stayed by Nero's side as his favorite in spite of the anger of his wife and, more importantly, the rage of his mother, Agrippina. Nero eventually retired her from the palace, though she left with a great deal of money and fine estates. She was one of the few who would survive Nero's affections!

The most serious problem was Nero's mother, Agrippina, a formidable woman in her own right. She was not going to easily renounce her hold on Nero, especially to the upstart Poppaea. It was only thanks to Agrippina that Nero was emperor at all. The sources accuse Agrippina of poisoning Claudius to bring her son to the throne, and there is no reason to doubt this.

Nero was only 16 years old when he became emperor, and Agrippina planned to rule through him. Thus, Agrippina was a serious threat to Poppaea's rise to power, and unlike Acte, she would not leave quietly.

Poppaea repeatedly taunted Nero about his attachment to his mother. Agrippina felt her influence slipping and even tried seducing her son. Observers in the court were scandalized by this incestuous behavior, which reduced Agrippina's popularity. At last, Poppaea and Nero decided to kill Agrippina as the only way to free the emperor from her influence. They arranged for a loyal freedman to enter her home and kill her.

As Nero pretended to mourn his mother, Poppaea had achieved her goal, but from then on, Nero had nightmares about his murdered wife and mother. But even as the emperor was plagued with regrets and descended to evermore excesses, Poppaea's influence rose.

In 63, Poppaea gave birth to a daughter, named Claudia. Nero gave both Poppaea and Claudia the title of empress. Tragically, Claudia died at four months old. Poppaea would continue to try to produce an heir to inherit the imperial title.



Agrippina

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN ROME

Poppaea's long-term influence came from her spiritual interests. Her attraction to Judaism led her to persuade Nero to institute the first large-scale persecution of Christians. This would begin a new stage in both Roman and Christian history.

There had been a large community of Jews in Rome for centuries before Poppaea's rise to power. They formed an important merchant group who had long-distant trade with Alexandria in Egypt and beyond, but they had been in Rome so long that they worked in many parts of Rome.

The Jewish historian Josephus was the only ancient historian to cast Poppaea in a favorable light, likely because she supported the Jews in Rome and in Judaea. When Josephus discussed the murders surrounding Nero, he never mentioned Poppaea's role.

The conflicts within Judaism—mainly between those who followed a traditional Judaism and those who favored the reforms proposed by Jesus and advocated by his apostles—reached Rome. The quarrels became so public that they spilled into the streets, causing Emperor Claudius, Nero's predecessor, to expel Jews to restore a public order.

On July 19, 64, a disaster hit Rome, bringing the controversy to a head. A great fire broke out in the city, and it spread quickly. For six days the fires burned. When the smoke finally cleared, Romans could see with horror that only four of Rome's 14 districts were left unburned. Three districts were completely destroyed, while the remaining seven had only a few half-burned houses left. As the ashes cooled, people's fear turned to anger, and they wanted someone to blame.

Suetonius claimed that Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome "since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus," which seems to be a reference to followers of Christ.

The immediate focus for the people's anger was the unpopular emperor Nero. Rumors spread that the emperor had started the fire himself.

But in fact, the emperor did much to help the suffering Romans. He opened public buildings and even his own gardens for the homeless, and he brought in food to feed the newly destitute. But nothing quelled the popular mutterings.



Some people said that Nero appeared on a private stage and sang of the destruction of Troy as he watched the fire of 64 burn. This claim, which was certainly false, has led to the long-standing accusation that Nero fiddled while Rome burned.

THE EXECUTIONS OF CHRISTIANS

Nero needed a scapegoat and a dramatic entertainment to deflect popular anger. And although he could have selected any number of groups to target—the easiest of whom would have been non-Romans who were living in Rome—he chose Christians.

The sources do not say that he consulted Poppaea, but it makes sense that he did. The emperor sent his guard to round up followers of the risen Christ. Then, he tortured them to get the names of others. In this way, he arrested hundreds of people and announced to the Roman people that he had found the criminals who had started the fire. Nero arranged the executions in his gardens and in his circus.

The historian Tacitus tells us that “mockery of every sort was added to their deaths.” Some Christians were covered with animal skins and torn apart by vicious dogs. Others were nailed to crosses, to be crucified either in imitation of Christ or simply as one of the Roman means of killing prisoners.

POPPAEA HELPS NERO PERSECUTE CHRISTIANS

The emperor's excesses did not serve him well, for the horrible deaths elicited some sympathy from the surrounding crowds.

At first, instead of blaming Romans for the horrible executions, surviving Christians—Jews who followed Christ—blamed other members of the Jewish community. In time, Christians would see this event as the beginning of a struggle between good and evil—Christianity versus Rome—that would shape both the religion and the empire.

As for the Jews, their troubles with Rome did not end with this conflagration. Two years later, in 66, Rome went to war against Judaea to end all the internal troubles in that region. They burned Jerusalem, including the great temple that was the heart of worship, which remains destroyed.

Things did not go well for Poppaea and Nero, either. In 65, Poppaea was pregnant again with the hoped-for heir. Nero was out celebrating with games and horse racing, and, according to one historian, he arrived home late after drinking a lot and Poppaea reprimanded him for staying gone so long. A huge argument followed, and Nero kicked her in the stomach. Poppaea had a miscarriage and died from loss of blood.

Poppaea was dead, and Nero was inconsolable.

A year after Poppaea's death, Nero saw a freedman named Sporus who resembled Poppaea. Nero ordered him castrated, married him, and called him Poppaea.

By 68, Nero had lost the support of much of the Senate and faced opponents claiming the throne. The 30-year-old emperor fled the city to a villa to prepare himself to commit suicide, robbing his opponents of the chance to kill him. But he could not raise the courage to kill himself. Just as the horsemen from the Senate were approaching his gates, he finally persuaded his loyal secretary to kill him. He died on June 9, 68, the anniversary of the death of his wife Octavia. There were many in Rome who found some poetic justice in his death on this date.

The death of Nero ended the Julio-Claudian line of emperors that began with Caesar Augustus. Without the legitimacy of the bloodline, Rome descended into civil war as competing emperors vied for the office.

Poppaea expresses the life of many men and women at the heights of power of the Roman Empire. The best of them were lured into vice and murder by the huge power of the imperial title. The worst of them indulged their vices but still sometimes expressed their humanity. Few, however, had the long-standing influence of Poppaea, whose combination of spirituality and cruelty launched the murderous Age of Martyrs that extended from 64 to 313, when Emperor Constantine put a stop to the periodic persecutions.

Readings

Malitz, *Nero*.

Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*.

Questions

- 1 How did Poppaea rise to power? What other women were competing with her in her rise to power, and how did she deal with them?
- 2 How did Poppaea support Jews, and what was the result of this support on the growing Christian community in Italy?
- 3 What was the result of the great fire of Rome in 64?

PLOTINA ADVISES EMPEROR TRAJAN

LECTURE 6

In the year 98, Romans were pleased with their new emperor, Trajan. He was the second of what have come to be called the Five Good Emperors—men who shaped some of the most prosperous years of the expanding Roman Empire. These men were largely marked by good policies, careful expansion, and Romanization of much of the Mediterranean world. Trajan was lucky enough to be helped by a very competent wife, Pompeia Plotina, who exerted a great deal of influence on the course of the empire—not by violence, but by the gentle force of her intellect and personality.





PLOTINA'S INFLUENCE

Both Trajan and Plotina had been born in the Roman province of Hispania—Spain—which shows that by the 2nd century the Roman Empire was sufficiently cosmopolitan that Rome's culture had spread widely.

Trajan was probably born in the Spanish city of Italica, near Seville, which had been a Roman settlement for more than 200 years before Trajan was born in 53. From there, he rose through the ranks of successful Romans, moving from the military to emperor.

Plotina was raised to be a traditional, conservative Roman woman. Plotina's family had many connections with the noble families in Rome, and the couple made a good marriage before Trajan became emperor.

When Trajan became emperor, Plotina became popular with the Roman people, and a real asset to Trajan.

It is hard to tease out Plotina's deeds from those of her husband Trajan, but the sources, such as Pliny's writings, allow us to get a good sense of the accomplishments of this remarkable woman.

The previous emperor, Nerva, had adopted Trajan—who was in his 40s—to succeed him as emperor. Such adoptions were formalities to ensure that a good man would become emperor. Trajan succeeded to the throne without violence or scandal, which was a welcome relief after the violence of so many of the previous emperors during the Julio-Claudian dynasty.



Trajan

Plotina's influence began in her household, which was complex. In the year 78, Trajan's elder sister, Marciana, became a widow, and she and her daughter, Matidia, came to live in the household of Trajan and Plotina. They lived harmoniously together, and this group of women would later shape the future of the empire.



Marciana

Trajan gave his sister the same public honors that he bestowed on his wife. Marciana received the title of empress—the only sister of an emperor to be so honored—and she had the right to strike coins with her image on them. Like Plotina, Marciana would often travel with her brother while he was on campaign or touring the empire.

Trajan is considered one of the best Roman emperors.

Throughout Rome's history—and today as well—such household arrangements could lead to jealousy and conflict. That was not the case in Plotina's home. Pliny the Younger, Trajan's biggest fan, was awed by the harmonious household of the emperor. He wrote of Trajan's women: "They respect each other, they defer to each other; both are so deeply devoted to you that neither thinks it of the slightest consequence to her which of the two you love better."

Pliny gave all the credit to Plotina, and that may have been so. Trajan and Plotina never had children, so they both invested their care in Marciana's daughter, Matidia, who grew up in the home.

However, Plotina's influence extended beyond her household. She regularly urged Trajan on to virtuous acts of governance. Trajan earned a reputation for being an honorable ruler, and it seems that Plotina urged him in that direction.

PLOTINA'S ETHICAL STANDARDS

The 2nd century in the Roman Empire was marked by a great upsurge in interest in religions that might give meaning to the new cosmopolitan life that marked such a large empire. Writers have characterized this period as a "longing for the divine," which drove seekers to flock to such religions as Christianity and cults of Isis and Mithra.

Plotina did not follow these "mystery religions," which were marked by an ecstatic experience of a deity. Instead, she was drawn to a more cerebral worship. She became a follower of Epicurus, a philosopher who lived 400 years earlier. Late in her life, Plotina wrote a letter claiming, "how much I am interested in the sect of Epicurus." This philosophy—which was really a religion—shaped this pious empress.

Epicurus introduced what has come to be called a Hellenistic philosophy. These philosophers, such as the Cynic Diogenes and the Stoic Zeno, founded long-standing schools that have drawn devotees into the modern age. Unlike the famous Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Socrates, who tackled lofty questions like the nature of truth and beauty, the Hellenistic philosophers simply considered how an individual could achieve happiness in an age in which vast, impersonal kingdoms brought pain and weariness.



Like Plotina, Thomas Jefferson was drawn to Epicureanism.

Epicurus did not seek comfort in the gods, though he believed in them. He said gods were too distant and uninvolved in this world to bring any comfort. The philosopher believed in a purposeless world of randomly colliding atoms, and even immortal souls were made of atoms. Epicurus's analysis of the gods and life can be summarized in his four-part cure, or *tetrapharmakos*:

Don't fear god,
Don't worry about death;
What is good is easy to get,
and
What is terrible is easy to endure.

Modern interpretations of Epicureanism suggest that followers are encouraged to follow a hedonistic path of wine, good food, and sensual pleasures, but this is an incorrect characterization. Extreme activities of any kind, including overeating and overdrinking, would inevitably bring pain, so they should be avoided.

Epicurus proclaimed that the whole purpose of life was to seek pleasure while remaining free from pain in both body and mind. Plotina's modest household epitomized Epicurean life; she lived her philosophy.

Epicurus's ethics can be summarized easily:
"Neither to harm, nor be harmed."

Because money was required to purchase the pain-free pleasures that Epicurus advocated, these philosophies had little relevance for most ordinary people, who looked instead to new religious ideas—such as those of Christianity—for a sense of meaning and hope.

It is to Plotina's credit, and her clear embrace of philosophy, that she was able to rise above the temptations of luxury to aspire to a calm life.

THE STEADY SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity had spread slowly, yet steadily, throughout the empire—particularly in the eastern portion.

Pliny, Trajan's representative, was sent to Amastris, close to the Black Sea, to look into corruption and fiscal mismanagement. While he was there, Pliny received accusations against Christians. Pliny sent a letter to Emperor Trajan to see what to do about them. These two letters preserve valuable sources of information about Christian communities and early persecutions.

Pliny couldn't figure out what crime Christians were guilty of. Even after torturing Christian slaves, he didn't know what to do with Christians who had been identified by their neighbors. These Christians included prominent members of the community, so Pliny had to struggle with the decision.

American sociologist Rodney Stark suggests that Christian growth remained consistent at about a 40 percent increase per decade.

By the middle of the 2nd century, when Christians came to Trajan's attention, there were between 7,500 and 40,000 of them distributed throughout the empire.

Trajan's answer—preserved in the famous Letter 97 of Pliny's correspondence—was short and practical but on tenuous legal grounds. The emperor wrote that "it is not possible to lay down any general rule which can be applied as the fixed standard in all cases of this nature." Trajan said not to hunt down any Christians but to punish those who came to Pliny's attention. He also warned his representative not to accept any anonymous accusations, recognizing this legal slippery slope.

This ruling shows how inconsequential Trajan thought these Christians were. His legal opinion was vague and not well thought out. He didn't think Christians were important enough to be worthy of much thought. But he was very wrong. His letter became precedent for centuries and was attacked for its impossible legal standing.

It is perhaps not surprising that Trajan gave such a cursory answer to Pliny's concern about Christians. The imperial family, guided by Plotina, supported Epicureanism. In fact, it is possible that Plotina guided the emperor's decision regarding the Christians, because she had more interest in these matters than he did.



Hadrian

Trajan's immediate successor, Hadrian, had to modify Trajan's policy toward Christians.

TRAJAN'S WARS

While Plotina guided the court in his absence, Trajan had long years of army service, and during his reign, his wars expanded the empire to its greatest extent.

His first great, successful war took place in the province of Dacia, north of the Danube in what is today roughly Romania. In two wars, in 101 to 102 and again in 105 to 106, he defeated the local king and made a province of Dacia. The Danube frontier from this point became a central borderland of the empire, and the armies here guarded the southern border of the new province.



Beginning in about 114, Trajan turned his attention to the east and opened a major war against the Parthians, who had a large empire centered roughly in today's Iran. This war consumed Trajan's final years—until his death in 117—and this time Plotina went with him on the campaign, along with Marciana and their ladies in waiting.

To hold Dacia, Trajan built a huge bridge across the Danube River. This famous structure was designed by a Syrian architect named Apollodorus and was considered a remarkable engineering feat. Today, only a few stone pylons remain.

Trajan marched east to expand Rome's territory and control any Parthian menace. Trajan first marched on Armenia, quickly defeating the local ruler and making it a province of the empire. Then, he continued east and south, conquering territory and establishing a Roman presence in the Tigris-Euphrates valley.

In 113, Trajan completed a giant column to memorialize his victories in Dacia and beyond. This column is 98 feet high and still stands in Rome today.

In 116, the emperor with Plotina sailed down the Euphrates River. At the south end of the Euphrates, he had his fleet dragged across land to the Tigris, where he continued south into the Persian Gulf. The emperor erected a statue of himself on the Persian Gulf to celebrate his victory.

**WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS:
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This expansion of the Roman Empire looks impressive on a map, but it was so expansive it would be hard to keep. Subsequent emperors would retreat to lands more easily held.

Sometime in late 116, Trajan fell ill, and he was forced to withdraw from active campaigning. Plotina and his guard arranged for a ship to return them to Rome, but he became more ill along the way. Trajan was dying, and he had made no provision for the succession.

Trajan and Plotina had no children, so if there were to be a smooth transition to the next emperor, Trajan had to adopt his heir. Before 100, Plotina had selected her candidate—Hadrian, who was probably from Spain. Plotina arranged for Hadrian to marry Marciana's granddaughter Vibia Sabina, making Hadrian a member of Trajan's extended family. The sources say that Trajan opposed the match but deferred to Plotina's wishes and accepted the union.

Trajan was probably right to oppose the match; the marriage was particularly unhappy, even for the standards of the age. But at their marriage in 100, the women of Trajan's household celebrated their choice of a husband for Vibia Sabina. However, according to the Roman historian Dio Cassius, Trajan never formally adopted Hadrian as expected, so there was no certainty about the succession. In 116, the sickly emperor was running out of time.

In 117, the ship carrying Trajan landed in the city of Selinus (modern Gazipasa) on the southern shore of modern Turkey. Plotina moved Trajan to a villa in the beautiful beach town. He had a stroke and was deteriorating rapidly. Still, the emperor did not name his heir.



Plotina emerged from the sickroom, where she been alone with Trajan. She said the emperor had claimed Hadrian as his heir just before he died. Later, she sent a declaration of adoption to the Senate—and to the new emperor Hadrian. The document was signed by Plotina, not Trajan, and it was dated 9 August, 117, a day *after* the emperor had died. Plotina arranged for Trajan's ceremonial cremation and accompanied his ashes to Rome.

Some of Hadrian's critics in Rome claimed that this whole thing was a plot by Plotina to make sure Hadrian would be emperor and that her friend Marciana would be the emperor's grandmother-in-law. That way, Plotina's place in the congenial household she had cultivated would remain secure.

Under Hadrian's reign, Plotina continued to play an influential role behind the scenes. Hadrian spent much of his reign away from Rome, leaving the women of the household in the capital. Hadrian never forgot his debt to Plotina—without her, he would not be emperor, and through him, her influence outlasted her husband Trajan.

Plotina became ill and died in about 122. Hadrian proclaimed her a deity at her death and provided a sumptuous funeral.

Readings

Bennett, *Trajan*.

Fantham, et al., *Women in the Classical World*.

Leppard and Frere, *Trajan's Column*.

Questions

- 1 What were Plotina's personal characteristics that helped make her so influential and remembered so positively?
- 2 What is Epicureanism, and how did Plotina support its growth?
- 3 How did Trajan become involved in the growing Christianity?
- 4 How did Plotina control Trajan's successor?

PERPETUA IS MARTYRED IN THE ARENA

LECTURE 7

In 203, Carthage in North Africa (located near the modern city of Tunis in Tunisia) was a spectacular cosmopolitan city—second only to Rome—and a prosperous jewel of the Roman Empire. The Vibius family lived in this prosperous province of Rome, and Vibia Perpetua was a daughter of this family. She was a Christian martyr, among the earliest that can be reliably identified. She also wrote a diary of her final days of life—a rare work written by a 3rd-century woman that was venerated for centuries.



POLITICAL FORTUNES OF THE EMPIRE

In 193, when Perpetua was a child, Lucius Septimius Severus, a general in Rome's armies, had himself declared emperor by his troops. Septimius had been born in North Africa, and, like many provincial young men, he had gone to Rome to study and begin the course of public life. He joined the army and served in Italy, Spain, Gaul, and Syria, rising consistently through the ranks. When there was imperial instability once Emperor Commodus was murdered in 192, and the next emperor, Pertinax, was killed the following year, Septimius saw his chance to rule and took it with the support of his legions.



Septimius

By 197, he had defeated his rivals and marched into Rome in triumph to take over the rule that would last until his death in 211. The remarkable thing about this accomplishment was that Septimius Severus was from North Africa; he was the first African emperor.

Septimius's first wife was a North African woman, Paccia Marciana. She died in 186. His second wife was Julia Domna, a Syrian daughter of a priest in the temple of the god Baal, who was also venerated in North Africa. He married her in 187, a few years before he took the title of emperor.

Julia bore him two sons: The first was Bassianus, whom history remembers as Caracalla, and the second was Geta. Septimius raised them to rule and urged them to always care for each other. But the hatred the brothers bore for each other overcame any hopes their father might have had for them.

Caracalla is a nickname that came from the kind of hooded cloak he favored.

In 201, when Septimius traveled to Egypt, he was much impressed with the worship of Serapis, a universal version of the traditional Egyptian god Osiris. When Septimius built a great triumphal arch in his own honor in his hometown—Leptis Magna, a city on the shore southeast of Carthage—he was portrayed as Serapis and Julia Domna was shown as the Egyptian goddess Isis. Now the imperial couple claimed to rule as incarnate deities, which probably wouldn't have mattered much, except Septimius decided to enforce respect by imperial decree.

In 202, Septimius issued an edict that forbade conversion to either Judaism or Christianity. Septimius had just returned from the east, where Jews and Christians were becoming more influential. Eusebius, the great 4th-century chronicler of church history, said that Septimius's edict fell hardest in Alexandria, the heart of the worship of the Egyptian deities Osiris and Isis, with whom Septimius associated as his patrons.

THE IMPACT OF SEPTIMIUS'S EDICT ON PERPETUA

Carthage had had a Christian community for about 130 years. By the 2nd century, there was an extensive Jewish community in Carthage, and the roots of Christian worship lay first in these Jewish communities. By Perpetua's time, there were probably about 2,000 Christians in a city of about 500,000. This percentage is small, but noticeable.

When Septimius issued his edict against new conversions in 202, all Carthage needed was a vigorous governor to implement the edict and an excuse to enforce it by seeking out Christians. They found both in 203.

The governor of the province was Hilarianus, who held a strongly conservative view of religion, venerating traditional Roman gods, such as Jupiter. He did not like religious novelty, and for him, Christianity fell into that category.

In 203, Hilarianus planned a series of games in the amphitheater to celebrate the birthday of Septimius Severus's son Geta. Hilarianus hit on the perfect birthday gift for an emperor who had everything: victims to die in the arena as a sacrifice for Geta's well-being. Hilarianus sought out slaves who were catechumens—that is, studying to be baptized as Christians.

When soldiers arrived at the house of the Vibii to arrest slaves who were catechumens, the daughter of the house—Perpetua, a 21-year-old newly married woman with an infant son—volunteered to be arrested with her slaves.



Geta

Four prisoners were taken: Revocatus and his wife Felicitas, Saturninus, and Secundulus. Then, Perpetua stepped forward and was included in the group that was arrested.

Perpetua's family name—Vibius—tells us that her family had been Roman citizens for generations and that her father was of a high rank, perhaps even a senator.

Perpetua and the Christian slaves seem to have been held for a few days in a kind of house arrest. During that time, Perpetua says she was baptized. At this point, she had fully violated the edict against conversion. The group was moved from house arrest to prison, and once they were in prison, another Carthaginian Christian stepped forward: Saturus, a leader of the Christian community who would join them in martyrdom.

The Romans did not have a designated prison; they didn't hold people for long. But the group of Christians was held near the forum on Byrsa Hill (which still exists), probably in an underground storage area.

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Members of the local Christian community bribed the guards to get them better quarters, where Perpetua was able to nurse her baby. Her family visited her, and she gave her mother the child. Once her mind was put at ease about the care of her child, she focused only on her upcoming ordeal in the amphitheater.

A few days later, they were brought to a hearing in the forum. Perpetua's father made a last plea for her to save herself, but she was resolute, and he left in tears. The other prisoners confessed to their faith, and when Perpetua appeared before Hilarianus, her father appeared again, this time holding her infant son. He urged her to sacrifice to the emperor, but she would not.

Hilarianus asked her the one question that was relevant to the hearing: "Are you a Christian?" Perpetua answered, "Yes." The trial was over, and Perpetua wrote joyfully in her diary: "We were condemned to the beasts, and we returned to prison in high spirits."

PERPETUA'S DIARY

The major part of Perpetua's diary consists of an account of four dreams she had while in prison.

Christians believed God sent dreams for Christian prophecy. Perpetua saw her dreams as messages from God, and she wrote them down so that the Christians in her community could share in God's prophecy.

In the centuries after her death, Christians reading Perpetua's description of her first dream used it to argue that heaven was a garden; in many of the other early Christian texts, heaven was a golden city. Her prophecy helped change Christians' view of the next world.

After her death, Christians used Perpetua's account of her second and third dreams as evidence that the living can help the dead. Christians prayed for the dead centuries before the church was organized enough to institutionalize the practice. Prayer for the dead became a core of Catholic belief, and Perpetua's diary is one of the several early confirmations for this belief.

Perpetua's final dream vision came the night before they were to enter the arena to confront the beasts. In her dream, she is victorious: "I began to walk in triumph towards the Gate of Life. Then I awoke." For her, the Gate of Life was a promise of heaven that would welcome her at the end of her ordeal.

One of the gates of the amphitheater was designated the Gate of Life for victorious gladiators, while the dead were removed through the Gate of Death.

She also provides her own analysis of her dream: "I realized that it was not with wild animals that I would fight but with the Devil, but I knew that I would win the victory."

Perpetua ends her diary by writing, "So much for what I did up until the eve of the contest. About what happened at the contest itself, let him write of it who will." She turned her diary over to someone in the Christian community who did indeed bear witness to the rest of Perpetua's story and continued the diary. The next day dawned, and the prisoners were led to the arena as the crowd cheered in honor of the emperor's son Geta's birthday.

Tradition claims that the narrator who finished Perpetua's diary was a man in the congregation, perhaps even the church father Tertullian.

There were five prisoners in the group: Perpetua, her slave Felicity, Revocatus, Saturninus, and Satorus. Secundulus had died in prison. As they marched into the arena, Perpetua sang a psalm, and the men taunted the crowd, shouting "You have condemned us, but God will condemn you."

The amphitheater was large; it seated about 30,000 people. Despite its size, it was a surprisingly intimate space; the crowd could talk to the participants and hear a response.

The first of the martyrs to face the beasts were the men. Saturninus and Revocatus were "matched with a leopard," but they were not killed. (It is often hard to make beasts attack in the arena.) Next, Saturninus was bound to a platform and attacked by a bear. Satorus was tied to a wild boar, but the boar ignored the martyr and attacked the gladiator who had tied the two together. Then, Satorus was placed with Saturninus to face the bear, but the bear refused to come out of its cage.

The organizers then brought the women. The narrator who continued Perpetua's account writes: "For the young women ... the Devil had prepared a mad heifer. This was an unusual animal, but it was chosen that their sex might be matched with that of the beast." The heifer tossed Perpetua to the ground, but she got up and helped Felicity, who had also been tossed. They went to the Gate of Life to wait for the final death blow.

Saturus, meanwhile, had been waiting at another gate. He taunted a soldier, saying, "So far not one animal has touched me. ... I am going in there and I shall be finished off with one bite of the leopard." It happened as he predicted.

Finally, the surviving Christians were brought to a platform, where they would be executed. Gladiators used their swords to kill the survivors, and the first three "took the sword in silence," demonstrating their bravery. When the gladiator turned his sword to Perpetua, he misstruck and hit her bone. She then "took the trembling hand of the young gladiator and guided it to her throat." The eyewitness writes: "It was as though so great a woman ... could not be dispatched unless she herself were willing." The account of the death of Perpetua ended, but, of course, life in Carthage went on.

The Christian community continued to grow and thrive, and the churches continued to read Perpetua's account of her visions and her passion for centuries after her death. Over the next 50 years, many new converts came into the church. By 245, North Africa had 90 bishops, each with a well-developed hierarchy of priests, deacons, and lectors. Other periodic persecutions would break out, bringing death in Carthage, but the church itself was well established.

The amphitheater in Carthage has fallen to ruin, but the space of the arena remains.

In the 19th century, Catholic monks built a small chapel dedicated to Perpetua in the subterranean passages that still remained of the original structure. Today, visitors walk in this space and remember the brave deaths of so long ago.

Perpetua's text remained stunningly popular for centuries. It was so treasured that the church father Augustine in the 4th century had to warn readers not to treat it as scripture.

Readings

Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*.

Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*.

Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion*.

———. *The Blood of Martyrs*.

Selinger, *The Mid-Third Century Persecutions of Decius and Valerian*.

Questions

- 1 How did Emperor Septimius Severus's religious policies affect the family of Perpetua? How did his origins in North Africa contribute to this conflict?
- 2 Why did Perpetua's prison diary devote so much attention to her dreams? How did her dreams influence Catholic theology?
- 3 How did Perpetua die? How do we know this?

JULIA MAESA CONTROLS AN UNUSUAL EMPEROR

LECTURE 8

In 217, the cruel and hated Roman emperor Caracalla was murdered, and it seemed that his death would end the dynasty established by his father, Septimius Severus. However, against all odds—and all logic—the dynasty was reestablished by a family of Syrian women who boldly took power and held it for years. Their story is an example of women coming to power with the aid of other women, rather than on the coattails of husbands or fathers.





A FAMILY OF SYRIAN WOMEN

Before he became emperor, Septimius Severus traveled to Syria. While he was in Emesa (the modern city of Homs), he visited the temple of the sun god El-Gebal, or Elagabal. The deity was in the form of a large black triangular stone, probably a meteorite, that was worshipped in a colonnaded temple.

Elagabal is an Aramaic name that means "god of the mountain."

Severus came to know Julius Bassianus, the priest of the temple. Julius had a young daughter, named Julia Domna, who had an auspicious horoscope: It said she was going to be the wife of a king. Septimius liked that idea, so he returned to Syria some years later and married Julia Domna. By 193, her horoscope had come true because Septimius had become emperor and she was empress.



Julia Domna

When she came to Rome, she was joined by her younger sister, Julia Maesa, who had married a Syrian nobleman named Gaius Julius Avitus. They had two daughters: Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea.

All the women in this family were given the name Julia as their first name after their father, Julius Bassianus.

Septimius Severus's son Caracalla ruled alongside his father as emperor beginning in 198 and then ruled on his own when his father died in 211. While he ruled, his mother, Julia Domna, handled his correspondence and other administrative duties. Rome became used to a strong, involved empress.

Because he did not want a rival to the throne, Caracalla murdered his brother Geta in 211 after their father died.

However, all this seemed to come to an end in 217, when Caracalla was on campaign in Turkey. He was stabbed to death by one of his soldiers, who was in turn immediately killed. The emperor's Praetorian Guard prefect, Macrinus, took advantage of the situation and named himself emperor. The Severan dynasty seemed to be over.

Shortly after Caracalla's death, Domna discovered she had breast cancer. Instead of waiting for the cancer to claim her, she reputedly committed suicide by starving herself to death. Macrinus didn't want Domna's sister in Rome, so one of his first acts was to send Julia Maesa a curt note insisting that she leave Rome and return to the east. He allowed her to take her possessions with her when she returned to Emesa, which was a mistake because she had accumulated an extraordinary fortune, and that money would help her ease back into power.

When Maesa set up her household in Emesa, she was joined by her two daughters, Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea. Soaemias was a widow of a Roman politician, and she had born him two sons. Only the younger had survived; his full name was Sextus Varius Avitus Bassianus, but he is remembered by a nickname he acquired after his death for the sun god he served: Elagabalus. He accompanied his mother to the household of his grandmother Julia Maesa. Julia Mamaea also accompanied her mother, and she was joined by her young son, Alexander Severus.



Caracalla



Julia Soaemias

THE MOST IMPROBABLE SCHEME

Before he died, Caracalla had assembled a large army in the east, and the troops were not particularly loyal to the new emperor, Macrinus. Maesa brought her daughter Soaemias to the troops with a stunning announcement: Soaemias claimed that her 14-year-old son was really an illegitimate son of Caracalla himself. As such, he was the legitimate heir to both the throne of Rome and the loyalty of the troops.

Astonishingly, the story was accepted, perhaps sweetened by Maesa's money. The boy, Avitus Bassianus, later known as Elagabalus, was smuggled into the camp, mounted a horse, and went with the troops to challenge Macrinus's troops. The boy fought bravely despite his lack of military experience, but at first the battle did not go well for his new army.



Macrinus

Just when Elagabalus's troops seemed about to abandon the revolt to bring the boy to the throne, Maesa and Soaemias turned things around. Grandmother and mother jumped down from their chariots where they were observing the fight and urged the troops to rally. Again improbably, that turned the tide, and Elagabalus won the Battle of Antioch on June 8, 218.

Macrinus had to flee to Rome to gather supporters for himself, but he was murdered on the way. Elagabalus was proclaimed emperor of the Severan line. (He took Caracalla's name—Marcus Aurelius Antoninus—as his official name.) There was never a more improbable candidate to rule Rome!

The first problem with the young new emperor was his clothing; he refused to dress in wool like a serious Roman. Instead, he insisted on dressing in the long silk robes and tiara of a priest of Elagabal. His grandmother and mother explained that Roman men did not dress in silk and that by Roman standards he looked more like a woman than a man, but Elagabalus didn't care.

Knowing the journey to Rome would take a while—they had to winter in the east before moving to claim the throne—the family hit on a strategy to get Romans used to the appearance of their new emperor. They commissioned a portrait of Elagabalus wearing purple and gold silks with necklaces and bangles and a great jeweled crown on his head. They ordered this portrait to be displayed in the Senate house so that the Romans could become accustomed to the appearance of their new emperor.

The portrait hung over the statue of Victory, a popular cult statue in Rome. This was a brilliant piece of propaganda on the part of Maesa: Now whenever senators gave an offering to Victory—a regular occurrence—they were in the position of simultaneously worshipping Elagabalus. Superstitious Romans were eased into accepting a new kind of emperor.

When Elagabalus finally arrived in Rome, the crowds recognized him in his flamboyant robes and feminine bangles. A new age had descended on the empire that, temporarily at least, shifted gender perceptions and roles.



Elagabalus

ELAGABALUS'S REIGN

No doubt under the influence of his grandmother, the new emperor first bestowed honors on his mother and grandmother. Both were declared empress—*augusta*—and given the authority to strike coins with their images.

These two women exerted a great deal of influence during Elagabalus's reign, for he wasn't much interested in governing. They acquired so much respect that one historian at the time wrote that whenever Elagabalus went to the army camp or the Senate house, he took with him his grandmother Julia Maesa in order, as he wrote, "that through her prestige he might get greater respect—for by himself he had got none."

Julia Maesa tried to institutionalize a role for all noblewomen to be able to take part in the governing of Rome. Women were traditionally excluded from the Senate, though Maesa was able to overcome this prohibition by joining Elagabalus in the meeting hall. Elagabalus also brought his mother, Julia Soaemias, into the Senate chamber on its first meeting.

Julia Maesa's authority came from her own political and social skills, but her rise was helped by a power vacuum at the top. Elagabalus was neither interested in politics nor suited for it.

Elagabalus was determined to bring the worship of the Syrian god Elagabal to Rome and preside over the worship as its priest. His first step was to bring the triangular black stone to Rome and install it in a newly built temple on the east side of the Palatine Hill. This temple was called the Elagabalium and became the center of worship.

Julia Soaemias urged Elagabalus, her son, to establish a women's senate as a location for noblewomen to meet and discuss issues. The body met, but its only known achievement was to issue a complicated code of etiquette for women in Rome.

The women's senate was dissolved at Elagabalus's death, but it was revived periodically later through the Roman Empire when women decided they had issues for collective action.

The emperor wasn't just adding a new deity to the Roman pantheon; he wanted to replace the old triad of Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva that had traditionally guarded Rome with his new god.

Elagabalus wanted to consolidate Rome's worship at this new temple to the sun, so he transferred Rome's most sacred relics to the Elagabalium. Reportedly, he also declared that Jews and Christians were to transfer their rites to his temple. It was unheard of to gather all the rites into one temple, and superstitious Romans muttered to each other about the seeming sacrilege.

Things grew worse when Elagabalus married one of the Vestal Virgins—women who had dedicated 30 years of their lives, their most fertile time, to chastity. Their renunciation was supposed to keep Rome safe. Elagabalus violated this taboo, claiming, "I did it in order that godlike children might spring from me, the high priest, and from her, the high priestess." This was part of his goal to subsume traditional Roman religion under his new cult of the sun god. Romans were horrified.

The emperor also renounced gender roles and embraced a gender ambiguity that Romans found shocking. Elagabalus enjoyed intercourse with both genders. He married and divorced four women and took male lovers. He also had a public wedding in which he married a man—his favorite lover, Zoticus, an athlete from Turkey. He wore makeup and was, as one historian wrote, "delighted to be called the mistress, the wife, the queen."

ROMAN ATTITUDES TOWARD MALE SEXUALITY

For Romans, being a man meant being an active member of society; he was to participate in politics and serve the public good. Women, by contrast, were expected to be passive recipients of public policy and wait indoors to receive the results of men's deliberations.

These ideas extended into sexual lives as well: To be a man meant being the active participant in sexual activity; to be a woman meant being the passive recipient of men's power.

This narrow definition of sexuality and gender meant that a man could have intercourse with whomever he liked—males, females, and even animals—as long as he was the active partner in the liaison.

THE END OF THE SEVERAN DYNASTY

Two years after Elagabalus's ascension to the throne, it was clear that the Praetorian Guard was losing patience with this emperor. His grandmother, Julia Maesa, saw the handwriting on the wall and set up a successor. She publicly claimed that Caracalla had sired her grandson, Alexander Severus, from her other daughter, Julia Mamaea; then, to forestall any criticism, she forced Elagabalus to legally adopt him, making him the new heir.



Julia Mamaea

In the next year—222—the Praetorian Guard lost patience with the eccentric emperor. They raised Alexander Severus to the throne and rampaged through the palace looking for Elagabalus. They found him and his mother, Julia Soaemias, in each other's arms, hiding in the palace toilet. The soldiers decapitated both mother and son and dragged their corpses through the streets of Rome to the shouts and derision of the people. Julia Maesa didn't publicly mourn the deaths of her daughter and grandson; she moved on to her other daughter.

Alexander was between 14 and 16 years old when he became emperor, and he was the youngest emperor to date. Due to his youth, he trusted his grandmother Maesa and his mother, Mamaea, to control his government.

The first thing the new administration did was to restore traditional Roman religion. The black stone was returned to Emesa, and Roman gods were fully restored to their old positions. Women were barred from attending meetings of the Senate, and the women's senate ceased to meet. And any gender ambiguity in Roman life was stamped out.

Astonishingly, despite this reaction against women's political roles, Julia Maesa retained her position of authority, though now she was a power behind the throne of her grandson Alexander.

Julia Maesa died a natural death a few years after her grandson Alexander took the throne. She had been so popular with the Roman people that she was declared a god.

Guided by his mother, Julia Mamaea, Alexander ruled until 235, when Mamaea offended the Roman people and, more importantly, the army, and the Roman legions assassinated both of them. This was the end of the Severan dynasty that had been guided by the indomitable family of Syrian women.

Readings

Dio Cassius, *Dio's Roman History*.

icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus*.

McHugh, *Emperor Alexander Severus*.

Questions

- 1 How did Julia Maesa manage to get Elagabalus declared emperor? Why do you think people believed her improbable explanation of Elagabalus's parentage?
- 2 Elagabalus is often described as a transgender emperor. What is the evidence for this? How did his behavior violate Roman norms for male sexuality?
- 3 What was the women's senate, and how was it revolutionary for Rome? What was its accomplishment, and what was its failure?
- 4 How did Maesa survive and prosper even after Elagabalus's fall?

ZENOBIA BATTLES THE ROMAN LEGIONS

LECTURE 9

In 250, Rome controlled the Mediterranean world. Its empire extended from the Atlantic Ocean in the west past the Tigris River in the east and from the North Sea to the Sahara Desert in the south. This was the greatest extent of the empire. The eastern provinces of this great empire were the most prosperous, including the city-state of Palmyra in the province of Syria, about 134 miles northeast of today's Syrian capital of Damascus. This lecture tells the story of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, who dared lead her armies against the power of Rome.







THE ANCIENT CITY OF PALMYRA

Palmyra was an established town in the perfect location on the edge of the Syrian Desert. It was incorporated into the Roman province of Syria around 14 CE, under the reign of Tiberius, and the province prospered. The city built great temples, theaters, and colonnaded city streets (the ruins stand today).

The city's prosperity boomed in the 2nd century. Part of the reason for this was due to the fact that Palmyra stood along the caravan route of the Silk Road, the most famous trade route in the world, and the Roman Empire offered a huge market with an appetite for exotic goods.

By the middle of the 2nd century CE, the city of Palmyra enjoyed a privileged status within the empire: It was ruled by what Rome called a client king— independent yet subordinate to the will of the Roman Empire. In the late 2nd century, however, the situation in this eastern region started to change.

In 235, the emperor Alexander Severus died, and for the next 50 years, there was chaos at the top levels of Rome. This era was dominated by what has come to be called barracks emperors—men who claimed the imperial throne by virtue of the strength of the armies at their backs. In a single nine-year period, there were as many as 18 challengers fighting for the throne.

In this chaotic environment, Palmyra, too, would find a leader to step forward. This illustrious citizen was Odaenathus, who rose through the ranks of Roman government in the city. He had several wives, the second of whom was an enterprising woman named Zenobia.

In the 250s, the rise of the Sasanian dynasty of the Persian empire in the east (today's Iran) challenged Roman rule. Over the course of Persia's rebellion, the Persian ruler Shapur I destroyed Palmyra's trade colonies all along the Euphrates River. According to one source, Odaenathus tried to negotiate with Shapur I to preserve Palmyra's trade interests, but he was rebuffed. War was inevitable.



Odaenathus

In 260, the Roman emperor Valerian marched against Shapur I of Persia. In a shocking battle for the usually victorious Romans, Valerian was defeated at Edessa and captured. Shapur rampaged through Syria, even taking the Syrian city of Antioch. Odaenathus now had his chance at power. As soon as the news of the defeat at Edessa reached Palmyra, Odaenathus declared himself king of Palmyra and began to increase his armies.

He marched rapidly against Shapur and engaged him west of the Euphrates River. He defeated the Persian forces, expelling them from Syria.

A year later, Odaenathus defeated a Roman general in Syria who had set himself up as emperor. The new—now legitimate—emperor, Gallienus, accepted Odaenathus's claim to the title *king of Palmyra*. Then, Odaenathus expanded his title to *king of kings*, which was a Persian title. Odaenathus was not challenging the Roman Empire; he was looking east. This seemed fine with Gallienus, who then created an alliance with Odaenathus to help secure the eastern borders. However, Odaenathus would not have long to enjoy his title. In about 266, he was assassinated, and in the same attack, his heir was also killed.

Who would step up to lead in Palmyra, or would civil war break out there?

ZENOBIA'S RISE TO POWER

In the ancient world, when women were able to take political power, it was usually because of a power vacuum—an instability in the usual order of things that allowed a woman to step up. That was the situation in Palmyra in about 266 when Odaenathus died. His second wife, Zenobia, who was in her late 20s, took power, ostensibly serving as regent on behalf of her young son. Zenobia's accomplishments eclipsed those of her husband, and she captured the attention of ancient historians.

According to the *Historia Augusta*, Odaenathus was assassinated by a cousin of his named Maeonius. The timing was suspicious to the ancient historian: The assassination took place right after Odaenathus named Herodes, his son by his first wife, coruler. According to the text, Zenobia wanted her own son to inherit this role, so she conspired with Maeonius to murder her husband and stepson.

Our main source of information about Zenobia comes from the *Historia Augusta*, a collection of biographies about famous people that was written at the end of the 4th century, 150 years after Zenobia's death. Evidence from coins and inscriptions corroborate many of the facts of the *Historia*.

Modern historians have questioned this account, but it is plausible. Zenobia was the only one who benefited from the assassination. The next day, the army handed the crown to her so that she could serve as regent for her 10-year-old son, Vaballathus. In fact, Zenobia took full control, and the boy never exercised any power.

Zenobia's first problem was to secure the borders on the east, where the Persian empire threatened. She fortified many towns along the Euphrates, including the citadel of Halabiye, which was later renamed Zenobia in her honor. The ruins of this fortification can be visited today.

Zenobia's general Zabdas followed her instructions and marched south, subduing Petra, Judaea, and Arabia. Zenobia already held Syria, with her capital in Antioch.

In 270, Zenobia's armies expanded still further. They entered the Roman province of Egypt and took the great city of Alexandria, establishing Palmyrene rule over Egypt.

During this swift expansion of Palmyra, the Romans were busy with internal problems. In 270, the emperor Claudius Gothicus had died, and his brother Quintillus seized power with the support of the Senate. However, he didn't have the support of the armies, and in September 270, the legions proclaimed their general Aurelian emperor. The general soundly defeated the armies that Quintillus managed to field, and in 272, Aurelian could turn his attention to reclaiming the lands in the east that Zenobia had taken.

By November 270, the mint in Antioch stopped making coins in the name of the Roman emperor and began issuing coinage in the names of Zenobia and her son Vaballathus.

By then, Zenobia had formally broken with Rome. She must have known that the relentless Roman legions would come, but perhaps her easy victories had lulled her into a false sense of security.

ZENOBIA'S RULE

Zenobia's enemies—Rome and Emperor Aurelian—were gathering forces to march to the east and challenge her newly established empire.

Aurelian brought his legions to Byzantium and crossed the Bosphorus to Asia Minor (modern Turkey) in April 272. The cities of Asia Minor opened their doors to the emperor. At the same time, Aurelian had sent a force to Egypt. By early June, the Romans had retaken Alexandria and two weeks later had retaken all of Egypt.



Aurelian

With Asia Minor secure and Egypt well in hand thanks to his competent generals, Aurelian turned his attention to Syria. Zenobia waited in Antioch while she sent her armies, led by her general Zabdas, north to defend her city. About 25 miles north of the city, at the Battle of Immae, Aurelian defeated the Palmyrene army.

Remnants of the army, along with General Zabdas, retreated to Antioch and brought Zenobia the bad news. The queen prepared to withdraw from Antioch to take a stand farther south, and to ease her withdrawal, she spread a rumor that Aurelian had been captured. Zabdas even drafted an imposter to act as a captured Aurelian and paraded him in chains through the streets. This calmed the people briefly, but once the Romans laid siege to the great walled city, it was only a matter of time until Antioch fell.

Zenobia escaped from Antioch to make a stand against Aurelian. She gathered her army of about 70,000 on the plain of Emesa (the modern city of Homs, Syria). Zenobia mounted her horse to lead her troops into battle.

As the battle raged, she rode into the center of it, fighting and calling out to her generals. At first, the Palmyrenes seemed to be winning, driving the Romans back, but eventually Aurelian's tactics succeeded again. Zenobia and her advisors fled to Palmyra, where they prepared for another siege.

By now, Zenobia was out of allies and out of time. Palmyra was certain to fall, and Zenobia had no fresh army to bring to the field.

Zenobia slipped out of the city and fled on a racing dromedary. Zenobia took off for the Euphrates River. If she could get across, she would be in Persia. She made it to the river but was recognized and captured as she boarded a boat. She was brought to Aurelian in chains.

Racing dromedaries is a popular sport today. These animals can sprint up to 40 miles per hour and sustain 25 miles per hour for an hour.

As soon as Palmyra heard about the queen's capture, the city surrendered. Aurelian took most of her court to Emesa, where he questioned the queen about her rebellion. At this point, Zenobia's instinct for survival overrode her pride. She claimed that she was a "simple woman" who had been led astray by her advisers.

Zenobia's deflection of blame landed hard on her advisers. Her general Zabdas was among the many who were executed. Aurelian spared Zenobia and her sons to take them back to Rome to display as captives in his triumphal parade.



The 6th-century Greek chronicler John Malalas reported that Aurelian tied Zenobia on a dromedary as she marched in humiliation through the eastern cities that she used to rule. In Antioch, she was chained in the hippodrome for three days to show the populace the results of rebellion against Rome. Then, they reached Rome for the triumph.

For centuries, Romans had traditionally offered a triumph to celebrate victorious generals, though since the founding of the empire, triumphs were limited to the emperor and his family.

Essentially a large parade, the triumph lasted all day, and the crowd watched with wonder as the emperor displayed captive exotic animals, wagons full of wealth, and many captive soldiers. Aurelian's greatest prize, however, was Queen Zenobia. She was weighed down with jewels and shackles of gold on her legs and neck.

After the triumph, a senator criticized Aurelian for parading a woman in a triumph "as if she were a general." Aurelian answered with great praise for Zenobia.



Perhaps the most remarkable thing about this bold woman's story is that it has a happy ending. Most prisoners were executed after marching in triumph, but Zenobia and her children were spared.

Aurelian liked Zenobia. He gave her a villa at Tivoli (the Roman town of Tibur), a lovely region 20 miles from Rome. Some ancient authors say she married a senator and lived out her life in the pleasant surroundings of a wealthy Roman.

Zenobia wasn't forgotten over the centuries since her death. Even into modern times, she has become a symbol for strong women. Catherine the Great, the 18th-century ruler of Russia, claimed to have modeled her reign on that of Zenobia, and other women rulers have done the same. She remains a hero in Syria, where she is a national symbol.

Readings

Southern, *Empress Zenobia*.

Veyne, *Palmyra*.

Zahran, *Zenobia*.

Questions

- 1 Where was Palmyra located, and how did this location contribute to its prosperity and its ability to challenge the Roman Empire?
- 2 What were Zenobia's policies once she became sole ruler? Consider both her military and domestic policies.
- 3 How did Zenobia's rebellion end? How did she manage to thrive after attacking Rome?

HELENA BRINGS CHRISTIANITY DOWN TO EARTH

LECTURE 10

In 272, the Roman legions were on the march. Emperor Aurelian had recently become emperor, and he was gathering troops to march east to confront the Palmyrene army of Zenobia. Aurelian planned to draw from troops distributed along camps on the borders of the empire. One such camp was Naissus (currently the city of Nis in modern Serbia), which had been a significant legionary camp since the 1st century, when Roman armies guarded the vital passes in the Balkans that served as roads into Greece and the cities in the east.





HELENA AND CONSTANTIUS

In 270, a young Greek servant girl named Helena worked in the tavern in Naissus. Like servant girls all over the empire, she brought the soldiers' food, and like tavern girls everywhere, she made conversation and gave the soldiers a small taste of home. She caught the eye, and won the heart, of an officer, a military tribune named Constantius Chlorus. There were about six tribunes in a legion, and each commanded some 800 soldiers, so he was of some consequence.

Officers in legionary camps were allowed to live with wives and concubines, and Constantius and Helena settled down together. In about 272, Helena bore a son, who was named Flavius Valerius Constantinus by his proud father—but he is known as Constantine.



Constantius

Constantius rose through the ranks and was one of Emperor Aurelian's personal guards. When Aurelian died in 275, the empire was in turmoil as a succession of emperors vied for control.

In 284, Diocletian took over. He was a strong authoritarian emperor who imposed a new administrative structure on the empire—called the tetrarchy, or the rule of four—to bring an end to the years of civil war in which one general after another took power. And Diocletian knew and respected Constantius.

There has been much dispute about whether Constantius and Helena were married; later sources say they were, while earlier ones stayed silent on this matter.

More than likely, Constantius took Helena as his concubine, and they lived together when he was not marching to the field.

In about 285, Diocletian divided the empire into two administrative units: The east governed from Greece and Egypt to the edge of the Sasanian Persian empire, and the west had Italy, Gaul, Britain, Spain, and the rest of North Africa.

Diocletian ruled in the east, making his capital at Nicomedia. He appointed his colleague Maximian emperor in the west with his capital at Milan, Italy. Constantius was appointed Maximian's *praetorian prefect*—his number-two man.



Diocletian

With Constantius's political star rising, it was time for him to find a wife more suitable, and more politically helpful, than a tavern girl, even if she was the mother of his son. In 289, he set Helena aside and married Maximian's daughter Theodora. Helena and her son, Constantine, went east to live in Diocletian's court. Probably the always-suspicious Diocletian wanted to ensure Constantius's loyalty by keeping Constantius's strong 17-year-old son as a well-treated hostage.

A few years later, in 293, Diocletian divided up the empire again: This time, each of the coemperors (*augustae*) appointed a caesar to rule over a portion of the empire. A general named Galerius was named Diocletian's caesar, and Helena and her son were transferred to his court. Constantius was made Maximian's caesar, and he went to rule in the far west of the empire, from Gaul to Britain and Spain. It seems as if the empire had been divided, but the intention was that these four men were united in their rule.

During these years in the court of the tetrarchs, young Constantine served in Rome's armies, distinguishing himself in the east. By 305, when he was in his early 30s, he had acquired the rank of tribune of the first order. The sources are silent about Helena, but at some point in these years, she learned about Christianity and became a convert.



DIOCLETIAN'S PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS

In 303, Diocletian introduced the worst persecution of Christians that the Roman world had yet seen. Instead of sporadic persecutions, the autocratic emperor wanted everyone to sacrifice to him. Christians were rounded up and tortured to make them renounce their faith. Some Christians hid, waiting for the rash of persecution to subside, and some Christians died.

Later in his life, Constantine claimed he had been at court when the persecution had been announced, but he did not support it. Helena was there, too; she was either silent about her Christian beliefs or she converted after seeing the strength of Christian martyrs.

In 305, in the midst of the persecution, everything changed. Diocletian announced his retirement and forced Maximian to do the same. Diocletian was very ill and in pain, and Christians saw the hand of God in his pain. Diocletian died in about 312, and he lived long enough to see the failure of his tetrarchy.

Diocletian's fortified palace in modern Croatia, on the coast of the Adriatic Sea, still draws visitors today.

As soon as Diocletian announced his retirement, an inevitable struggle for power broke out. Constantius, Constantine's father, immediately invited his son to join him in Britain. Galerius did not want to let the popular young man out of his sight, but he grudgingly gave his permission. The father and son reunited after 13 years. The reunion was brief, though, for Constantius died the following year in England.

Constantine was proclaimed emperor by his troops and began to consolidate his power. Like his father before him, he married a daughter of Maximian, named Fausta. Also like his father before him, Constantine set aside another woman named Minervina for a political marriage, but unlike his absent father, he did keep his illegitimate son, Crispus, close to him for the next 20 years. His marriage to Fausta did not stop him from going to war with her brother, Maxentius, for the title of sole ruler of the empire.



Constantine

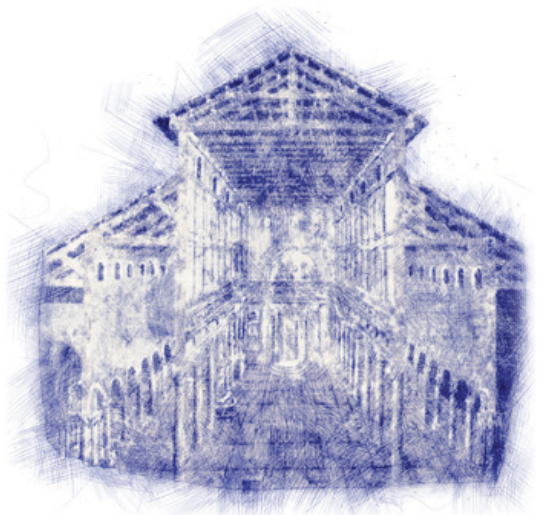
The great turning point for Constantine—and Christianity—came in the Battle of Milvian Bridge, which spans the Tiber River in the north of Rome. Maxentius gathered his forces—twice as many as those commanded by Constantine. The night before the battle, Constantine had a dream in which he saw a Christian symbol with the words "*In hoc signo vinces*" ("By this sign you shall win"). Whether the symbol was a cross or a chi rho (the two Greek letters that start the name Christ) remains controversial. Whichever it was, he had his soldiers mark their standards with the Christian symbol, and indeed, Constantine's forces won. Maxentius was drowned in the Tiber, and Constantine entered Rome victorious. He was now emperor.

As soon as Constantine took the title of caesar, he returned his mother to prominence—with greater honors than any other imperial mother had enjoyed. In 324, he awarded her the title *augusta*, or "empress."

HELENA'S ROLE IN SHAPING THE CHURCH

Many scholars credit Helena with influencing Constantine in his religious policy. Constantine ended the persecutions Christians had suffered under the rule of Diocletian by issuing the Edict of Milan, which made Christianity one of the accepted religions of the empire.

Helena also influenced Constantine to support Christian churches and Christian advisors. He threw the full weight of his power and money to support Christianity. In Rome, Constantine began building the great Saint Peter's church, what is now known as Old Saint Peter's Basilica, and supported the building of other churches.



Because of their support of the church, both Helena and Constantine are venerated as saints in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Constantine's role in guiding the church is well known: He presided over the Council of Nicaea that drafted the Nicene Creed, built churches in Rome and elsewhere, and founded the city of Constantinople.

Both Helena and Constantine helped transform Christianity from a religion that focused on the next world to one that had roots in this world. And Helena is credited for helping make the cross the overriding symbol of the Christian faith.

Constantine and Helena turned Jerusalem into a Christian city and pilgrimage site.

Helena traveled to Jerusalem to locate the holy spaces of Christianity. The 5th-century historian Socrates Scholasticus wrote that she was looking for the sepulchre of Christ from which he arose from the dead. She located it under the Temple of Venus that Hadrian had erected over the spot. Christians had venerated the spot for a century after the resurrection, and when Hadrian came to turn the city into a Roman one, he specifically targeted that venerated spot to build a temple.

The empress had the Temple of Venus excavated and located what she identified as the tomb of Jesus. She ordered the building of a great church to serve as a pilgrimage site, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was founded. She named the church the New Jerusalem—the sacred spot on earth to supplement the heavenly Jerusalem that had represented the longing of early Christians.

As in most matters of ancient religion, there is controversy over whether Helena found the actual tomb of Jesus. The continued controversy shows what Helena launched: a hunt for the spaces holy to Christianity.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre still draws many pilgrims and visitors today. There is a chapel in the church called the Chapel of Saint Helena in memory of Helena's contribution.

Catholics defend the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as the site of Jesus's original tomb, while most Protestants prefer what is called the Garden Tomb that was discovered in the 19th century outside the old city walls.

The general scholarly consensus is that the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has more evidence in its favor.

Helena also founded churches over a cave in Bethlehem where Christ was purportedly born. She built a church on the Mount of Olives, the place where the Christian faithful believe Christ ascended to heaven. These holy places continued to draw pilgrims for more than 1,000 years.

Helena purportedly found three crosses in the sepulchre, and one was said to be the cross on which Christ died. She also found the board that said Christ was the king of the Jews and the nails that held his body to the cross.

The discovery—whether true or not—placed the cross in the center of worship for Christians. Before Constantine, the cross was seen as an object of shame; early Christians celebrated the Resurrection, not Christ's death. Helena left one bit of the True Cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and sent the rest back to Rome and Constantinople.

Reportedly, Helena had a ship loaded with earth from Jerusalem, and when she returned to Rome, she built the Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem to house the relic of the cross. She had the dirt of Jerusalem spread under the floor of the church so that congregants could stand in Jerusalem as they gazed in wonder at the cross. This is how Christianity—under Helena's influence—became centered on the earth of Jerusalem.

Helena died when she was about 80 years old. It was about 330, a few years after her return from Jerusalem. She was declared a saint and is venerated by Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Helena's efforts to make Christianity a religion centered on the space and land of Jerusalem explain how that patch of contested Holy Land became the violent battleground for crusaders for centuries as Christians and Muslims vied for control of the holy spaces.

Readings

Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*.

Grant, *Constantine the Great*.

Pohlsander, *Helena*.

Questions

- 1 How did Helena gain such influence? What was her relationship with her daughter-in-law Fausta?
- 2 How did Helena's son Constantine rise to power? What caused his support of Christianity?
- 3 How did Helena influence Christianity, both in Rome and in Jerusalem? What holy spaces did she locate?
- 4 How have Helena's explorations in Jerusalem influenced the modern world?

GALLA PLACIDIA SUPPORTS THE VISIGOTHS

LECTURE 11

In 410, the Roman Empire seemed under siege. The great warrior emperor Theodosius had died in 395, and in the 15 years since his death, his heirs had let their legacy deteriorate. Theodosius's two incompetent sons ruled a divided empire, with Arcadius in the east and Honorius in the west. Theodosius's daughter from his second wife, Galla Placidia, was of a different character from her half brothers. She was strong, well educated, pious, and competent. In 410, Placidia was living royally in Rome, and everyone thought Rome's venerable walls would keep her safe. But violent tribes invaded and disrupted the peace.



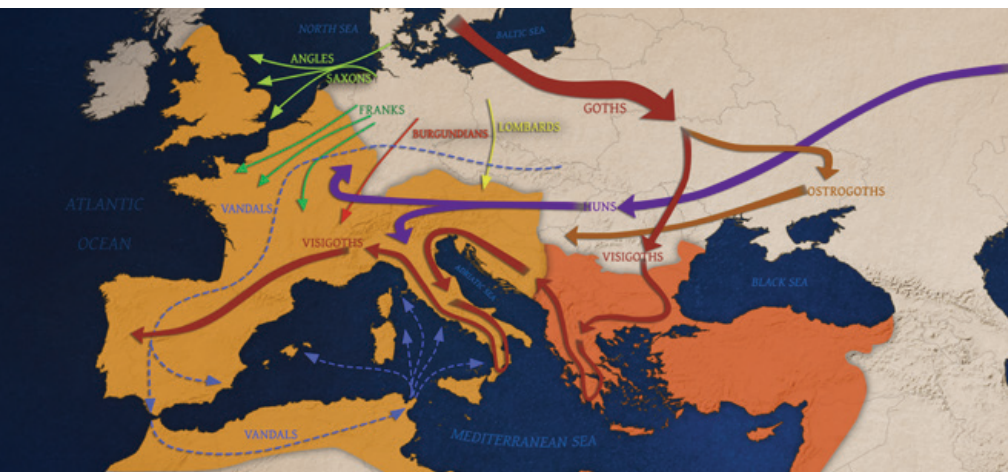
THE GOTHS

Rome had always experienced fierce fighting on its borders. Their main adversaries were various Germanic tribes on the northern and eastern borders of the empire. Theodosius had fought them, negotiated with them, and sometimes hired them to fight in his armies, and he was not the first emperor to do so. In fact, since the middle of the 4th century, Rome had relied on more and more mercenaries to guard the empire's borders, and many of these mercenaries were tribal members.



Theodosius

This situation changed in the late 4th century, when a Mongolian tribe originating in northern China swept out of the steppes of Asia. These were the Huns, and they struck terror in the hearts of the Germanic tribes in their path. The Germanic tribes began to push across the border of the empire to find new homelands within the lands of Rome itself. There were a bewildering number of these tribes—Burgundians, Franks, Saxons, Angles, and others—but the Goths were the ones who invaded Italy and confronted the heirs of the Theodosian dynasty.



In 376, 100,000 Goths had crossed the Danube with the permission of the emperor, and they had hoped to settle and establish a homeland. Emperor Theodosius first fought against them as they plundered in the Balkans, but then he made peace with them. His relationship with the Goths remained good, and they even fought as mercenaries in his armies, but then the wise emperor died, leaving no one to negotiate sensibly with the Goths.

Just when the Theodosian dynasty was led by the incompetent Arcadius and Honorius, the Goths acquired a brilliant king: Alaric.

In 404, Alaric decided to invade Italy to force the emperor to give him land, food, and a position in the Roman army. Instead of negotiating, Honorius fled to Ravenna, hiding behind the swamps as Alaric raided the rich Tuscan lands.

Arcadius ruled the eastern portion of the Roman Empire, with his capital in the great walled city of Constantinople. Arcadius never left the magnificent palace overlooking the Bosphorus—even when warlike tribes swept into the empire and plundered the lands of Greece.

Next, the violent tribes headed west to challenge Arcadius's brother, Honorius, who wasn't much more competent than Arcadius. When the tribes invaded Italy beginning in 401, Honorius withdrew his court from Milan to Ravenna, a defensible city on the Adriatic Sea behind marshes that kept barbarians at bay.



Alaric

In 408, Alaric tried again. He brought about 30,000 soldiers and surrounded Rome, laying siege to the Eternal City. Romans offered him a king's ransom to lift the siege—gold, silver, silk robes, and 3,000 pounds of pepper. Alaric took the loot and left, but the problem of a homeland still wasn't solved.

Honorius still wouldn't negotiate, and in the winter of 409, when hunger struck the Gothic camps, Alaric brought a siege on the city of Rome again. When famine hit the city, someone within decided to end the siege. According to the chronicler Procopius, a high-born woman named Faltonia Proba opened the gate to let the Goths in so she could end the hunger.



Honorius

It seems that Alaric's entrance into the city had been negotiated: Alaric told his men they had only three days to sack the city, during which they could take as much loot as they could.

The greatest prize the Goths took was the princess Galla Placidia. With her as a hostage, Alaric believed he finally held the key to negotiating with Honorius. In return for the princess, Alaric expected to get land and food. To be sure she was well treated, Alaric entrusted this valuable hostage to his brother-in-law, Athaulf. But Alaric didn't realize that Honorius wasn't interested in the fate of his sister; he offered nothing for her return.

After three days of looting, Alaric led his Goths south out of the city. Their wagons were laden with booty again, but little food, because Rome was starving during the siege. He brought Placidia with him, still expecting eventually to trade her for a king's ransom.

Alaric led his wagon train south along the Appian Way from Rome to Capua—about 130 miles. They went through the mosquito-laden marshes, and the sources say many of the Goths fell ill during this passage. Near the town of Cosenza, Alaric died. Jordanes, the historian of the Goths, wrote, "his people mourned him with the utmost affection."



The Goths elected as their leader Athaulf, who had been guarding Princess Placidia. Jordanes tells us that Athaulf was attracted to her for "her nobility, beauty, and chaste purity." But as they traveled together through Italy for the next few years, Athaulf came to appreciate her brains and listen to her advice. The chronicler Orosius wrote that Athaulf's mind was changed "by the persuasion and advice of Placidia, a woman, of a very keen mind and very good religiously." Her persuasive advice changed both the history of Rome and that of the Visigoths.

PLACIDIA'S ADVICE

Placidia first taught Athaulf of the benefits of Roman law. Late in her life, when she ruled the western part of the empire as regent for her son, Placidia was actively involved in legislation and legal reform. Many laws were written by her, and she was involved in the compilation of the Theodosian Code, the influential codification of Roman law made by Placidia's nephew in the east, Emperor Theodosius II.

Placidia also seems to have influenced the Goths in the direction they decided to settle. Through the reign of Alaric and beyond, the Goths had focused on a homeland in the Balkans, where they first entered the empire. This traveling, raiding band seems to have been waiting for Emperor Honorius to relent and give them a homeland. In late 411, Placidia persuaded Athaulf to head west to Spain.

In the early months of 412, Athaulf and Placidia arrived with the tribe in the Po valley in northern Italy. They raided for food and prepared to cross the Alps into Gaul (modern France).



Athaulf

At this point in their history, Athaulf's tribe of Goths came to be known as the West Goths—the Visigoths—to distinguish them from the East Goths, the Ostrogoths, who shaped the history of Italy in the succeeding decades.

In 413, the Visigoths successfully took Narbonne, France, without a fight. During Roman times, Narbonne was an active port that offered easy access to trade in the Mediterranean, as well as inland, because it was located on two major Roman roads: the *Via Domitia*, the major road linking Italy to Spain, and the *Via Aquitania*, which led to the Atlantic Ocean through Toulouse and Bordeaux.

Remnants of the *Via Domitia* can still be seen in the central square of Narbonne, France.



During the fall of 413, when Athaulf and Placidia were in Narbonne, they came up with a new plan for their future. Instead of seeking to become a general in Rome's army or a king of the Goths, Athaulf decided to rule the whole empire.

Probably most of this was Placidia's idea, because Athaulf couldn't do it without her, and probably couldn't even conceive of ruling without her. Thus, a forthcoming wedding in Narbonne was announced.

Placidia's brother Honorius was furious. He had planned for Placidia to marry his general Constantius and demanded that Athaulf return the princess immediately. Honorius was suddenly interested in his sister's fortunes because although he had married twice, he never consummated either marriage, and by the time of Placidia's announced marriage, he knew he would produce no heirs. Therefore, the Theodosian dynasty in the west depended on his sister's children.

Athaulf and Placidia married in January 414 at the mansion of Ingenius, a prominent Roman citizen of Narbonne. There was a great feast, during which Romans and Visigoths toasted to each other's health. According to the chronicler Orosius, Athaulf claimed he wanted to avoid war and was "eager for peace." In this, Orosius said he had been influenced "by the persuasion and advice of his wife, Placidia."

When Athaulf sent word to Honorius that they were "now one family," Honorius's general Constantius was beside himself in fury. One source wrote that he "nourished the hope that if he could defeat Athaulf he would marry Placidia." He waited in silent anger until his time would come, but meanwhile, the happy couple continued their travels to Spain.

THE VISIGOTHIC KINGDOM OF SPAIN

Sometime in the late winter of 414, the Visigoths moved along the *Via Domitia* south and then picked up the *Via Augusta* into Spain to reach their goal: the Roman city of Barcino (today's Barcelona). As they approached the great walls that surrounded the city, the gates were opened to the daughter of Theodosius and her husband. The couple settled into the city, occupying the royal palace near the cathedral in the northwest corner of the city.

Placidia became pregnant during their journey, and sometime in early 415, she delivered a boy—a perfect heir to the imperial throne.

As was traditional in Rome, the boy was placed at his father's feet and Athaulf lifted him, claiming his son, and named him Theodosius, after Placidia's father. But sometime in the summer of 415, the infant died, and Athaulf and Placidia grieved deeply.

During the late Roman Empire, only two out of every three infants survived their first year, and boys died in greater numbers than girls.

A few weeks after the child's death, Athaulf was stabbed by one of his retainers, a man named Dubius, who held an old grudge against the king because Athaulf had killed Dubius's previous master. The king was rushed to the palace for treatment, but the wound was too severe. On his deathbed, Athaulf told his successor to return Placidia to Honorius and thereby secure Roman friendship. It was the right decision, but it took some time for Visigothic nobles to sort out their next leader and negotiate a treaty with Rome to return Placidia for a decent ransom.

Honorius and his general Constantius were ready to get Placidia back. They offered the Visigoths a huge quantity of grain. The Visigoths became official allies of Rome with territory of their own and established a kingdom with land and laws of their own. They were no longer a wandering tribe. Their kingdom first extended all the way from Spain into France before they settled into the Visigothic kingdom of Spain. Under Placidia's patronage, they did very well, becoming prosperous allies of Rome.

Placidia went back to Ravenna—with the desire to rule. She also had the will to patiently wait until she could reign.

Honorius forced Placidia to marry Constantius, and they had two children: Valentinian, who would eventually reign as emperor, and Honoria, a daughter. Constantius died while their children were small, and Honorius died a few years later.

Placidia was an influential empress in the west for 25 years—first as regent from 425 to 437 until her son reached majority and then exerting a strong influence over him until her death in 450. She died successful and secure in the knowledge that she had left an heir on the throne.

Visitors today who visit Ravenna look with awe at the magnificent mosaics Placidia contracted as she built churches to grace her capital city. The building now called the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia isn't her mausoleum; it's the remnants of a great church that she had commissioned.

Readings

Oost, *Galla Placidia Augusta*.

Salisbury, *Rome's Christian Empress*.

Sivan, *Galla Placidia*.

Questions

- 1 How did the relationship between Placidia and her brothers affect the course of the western Roman Empire?
- 2 How did Placidia end up marrying a Visigoth? What was the impact of this marriage?
- 3 Why did Placidia's daughter propose marriage to Attila the Hun? How did that work out?

HYPATIA DIES FOR INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

LECTURE 12

In 393, Alexandria was one of the most cosmopolitan cities in the Roman Empire. Located on the Nile delta in Egypt, it was a crucial stopping place for travelers, goods, ideas, and even soldiers. The ancient city had been built in about 331 BCE by Alexander the Great, the eponymous founder of the city. The most famous location in this venerable city was the Museum of Alexandria with its adjacent library, which remained a center of learning in the ancient world, drawing scholars from all over the Mediterranean. One of the significant scholars was a woman named Hypatia, whose reputation for learning remained long after her brutal murder.



HYPATIA'S REPUTATION FOR WISDOM

Some of the greatest minds of the ancient world had been shaped in the Library and Museum of Alexandria, including Euclid, the father of geometry; Archimedes, the great mathematician and inventor; and the geographer Ptolemy. The progress of scientists and scholars who taught and learned at Alexandria continued for 600 years.

In the ancient world, virtually all writings were in scrolls; books bound within covers would only begin to appear in Egypt and beyond in the 5th century.

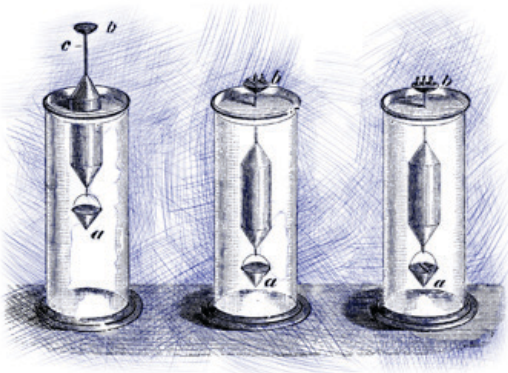
In the middle of the 4th century CE, the museum and library boasted another famous mathematician: Theon. He wrote treatises on Euclid and other scientists, and he wrote a major treatise on the astrolabe—a navigational instrument that was critical for long-distance shipping for centuries. However, Theon is most noted for his daughter, Hypatia, who quickly surpassed her father in wisdom and teaching.

Hypatia was a visible, public figure in her day, and therefore several contemporary sources wrote about her life. Some supported her, while others opposed her—but the combination offers a view of a brilliant, controversial woman.

Theon taught his daughter from her youngest years, and she grew up to surpass her father. She mastered her father's scientific work, which we know because she wrote commentaries on scientific works of geometry, conics, and astronomy, complete with the calculations of the heavens used on astrolabes.

Copernicus—the famous 16th-century astronomer who demonstrated that the sun was the center of the universe—may have been influenced by Hypatia's writings.

We also know that she knew practical applications of these scientific principles. A precious letter to Hypatia survives in which one of her students asked her to build him a hydrometer, which measures the density of a liquid relative to water. This is the first written reference to such a device, so historians of science consider it a valuable text, and it is important evidence of Hypatia's technical skills.



Hypatia mastered the practical scientific works, but her real love was philosophy, which for millennia remained the discipline of study for the greatest minds—and Hypatia was one of them. She grappled with the large ideas of philosophy and established a reputation for wisdom that spread far and wide.

NEOPLATONISM AND CHRISTIANITY

From as long ago as the 2nd century CE, and probably before, many in the Roman Empire were wrestling with the question of how to bring humans and the gods closer together; there was a longing for the divine among humans of this world. Several paths were proposed to solve this dilemma.

From the 3rd century, educated Greeks and Romans looked to the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, who seemed to offer a way to understand the connection between this world and the next. Plato had posited that this world was only a shadow of the perfect world that existed somewhere else, such as in the mind of God. In his famous allegory of the cave, we are all like prisoners chained in a cave facing the back wall, where we can see only shadows of the reality outside the cave, behind our backs.

But Plato didn't give any explanation for how to breach the distance between the cave of this world and the reality of the next. That's where 3rd-century Neoplatonism ("New Platonism") came in.

The Neoplatonists proposed a method by which the ideas in the mind of the "One" (or the "Good," or Nous) emanated to earth. They believed in a hierarchy of emanations from the One through another entity called the Word (or Logos) through a third entity called the World Soul. Finally, the emanations from God would manifest in the visible world. In other words, this explanation offered a way for the reality outside Plato's cave to enter into this dark world.



Plato

Neoplatonic explanations were particularly popular because they offered a technique to figure out how to join this world with the supernatural one. The corollary of this hierarchical structure was that believers could work their way back up from this world into the next through techniques of meditation and prayer.

In the 3rd and early 4th centuries, Neoplatonism was winning the hearts and minds of many in the Roman Empire. This was the main competition for the spreading Christianity, which also offered a way to join this world with the next in the person of the incarnated Christ, who joined human and divine in his own person.

This competition for the soul of the Roman Empire ended in 391, when the emperor Theodosius (father of the empress Galla Placidia) declared paganism illegal and made Christianity the only legal religion of the empire. Theodosius had gone much further than Constantine, who had simply insisted that Christianity was one of the acceptable religions of the empire.

With a stroke of Theodosius's scribe's pen, the official Roman Church was born. But his decree did not mean that everybody immediately became Christian. In fact, the Platonic Academy in Athens was not closed until the 6th century under the reign of Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora. And there were many Christians who found the philosophy of Neoplatonism perfectly compatible with Christianity.

SYNESIUS'S LETTERS TO HYPATIA

By 392, when Christianity was made the only legal religion, Hypatia had already established her reputation as a Neoplatonic philosopher. The future bishop and scientific inquirer Synesius came to Alexandria to study with her, writing that she was a person so famous that her reputation seemed incredible. He said that she "honorably presides over the mysteries of philosophy."

Synesius learned so well from her that he became one of the people credited with reconciling Neoplatonism with Christianity. Synesius was so proud of his analysis that he sent Hypatia one of his works, called *Dio*, in which he reconciled Neoplatonism with the Christian concept of the Trinity.

In about 400, Hypatia became the head of the Neoplatonic school in Alexandria. One source suggests that she was actually paid with public funds for this job. This would have been a remarkable achievement for anyone—and virtually unheard of for a woman. She had become so popular that she moved beyond the museum and library to bring philosophy to the public square, where she lectured on Plato, Aristotle, or the works of any philosopher requested by someone in the audience.

The Museum of Alexandria was founded in about 270 BCE by King Ptolemy II and his sister-wife Arsinoe II.

It is impossible to overstate how unusual it was for a woman in 4th-century Alexandria to talk in the public square to educate the men of the city, and the male historians weren't sure how to treat Hypatia's accomplishments in the public arena.

Thankfully, a series of letters written to Hypatia from her former student Bishop Synesius of Cyrene offer a glimpse of a more private side. Synesius addresses all the letters "To the Philosopher"; Hypatia was the one philosopher above all others to him.

Synesius's letters to Hypatia cover several kinds of themes and all testify to her important influence in his life. Some letters referred to intellectual pursuits while others asked Hypatia for references for some students as well as recommended young scholars to be accepted as her students. Still other letters were personal; in times of despair, Synesius turned to philosophy in general and Hypatia in particular.

One of the significant things to note about Synesius's letters to Hypatia was the complete lack of any discussion of a Christian God or even Christian themes. Synesius may have been a bishop, but he remained at heart a Neoplatonist. Like many Christians, he saw no contradiction in these terms.

Synesius's letters illustrate that there was no necessary tension between Neoplatonists and Christians. Even though since 392 paganism had been declared illegal in the Roman Empire, philosophers had no reason to fear reprisals, and there was no particular religious reason for Hypatia to run into trouble. However, there were political reasons.

Socrates credited the "cultivation of her mind" for giving Hypatia a "self-possession and ease of manner," which allowed her to appear in public in front of magistrates or any "assembly of men."



Roman pallium

THE OLD ORDER VERSUS THE NEW

Since Theodosius's decrees making Christianity the official religion, Christians had become politically more powerful. The bishops in great cities like Alexandria had become powerful political figures in their own right, and there was frequent tension between bishops and civil administrators—and it didn't matter whether the administrators followed Neoplatonism, Christianity, or some combination of the two. This was the case in Alexandria in 415.

The Roman governor of Alexandria was Orestes, and the newly appointed bishop was Cyril. The two clashed repeatedly in a struggle for power. As if this weren't enough conflict, the Jews in Alexandria also entered into the conflict because the growing power of Bishop Cyril seemed to be encroaching on their own political situation.

Conflict first broke out when the Jews believed Cyril was encroaching on their privileges. They rioted and in the process killed many Christian supporters of Cyril. Cyril responded by expelling many—or all (the texts are contradictory)—of the Jews of Alexandria. Orestes was furious, because he believed it was his prerogative to expel people and Cyril had usurped his authority. Orestes refused to accept Cyril's proffer of friendship, and things got worse.



Cyril

Christian monks living in the mountains near Alexandria heard about the dispute and decided to get involved. The contemporary historian Socrates Scholasticus writes that about 500 monks (surely an exaggeration) came into the city.

They caught the governor in his chariot and accused him of being a pagan idolater. Though Orestes protested that he had been baptized, the monks didn't care—one threw a stone at him, striking him on the head. As blood flowed from his wound, the citizens of Alexandria ran to the rescue of their governor, driving the monks out of town.

After this violence, Hypatia got swept up into the political controversy. For Christians, Hypatia represented an old order—one in which civic governors were in charge and ideas were freely discussed. This seemed to detract from what they perceived was a new order, in which bishops would guide the cities and their faithful. In 415, during Lent, their rage exploded. When Hypatia was returning home in her carriage, they surrounded her and dragged her out and then took her to a church called the Caesareum, where they murdered her.

Socrates tells us that most people—including the emperor—blamed Bishop Cyril for this horrible deed. Even if he had not ordered the murder himself, the violence that he fomented certainly erupted in the streets of Alexandria to horrible results. But Cyril did not experience any repercussions from this murder; he served as an influential bishop for the next 30 years.

Hypatia's career, influence, and horrible death have been long remembered, and she became a symbol for those advocating freedom of intellectual activity.

In modern times, Hypatia's reputation as a scientist and philosopher has endured. In the skies, an asteroid is named after her, as is a lunar crater.

In 2002, Egypt opened a new library in Alexandria intended to recreate the impressive original library. The Egyptians hope this structure will rekindle some of the intellectual vigor that made such an impact in the ancient world.

Readings

Deakin, *Hypatia of Alexandria*.

Kersey, *Women Philosophers*.

Waithe, *A History of Women Philosophers*.

Walts, *Hypatia*.

Questions

- 1 Why was the great Library of Alexandria such a center of learning in the ancient world?
- 2 What academic skills did Hypatia master? Which do you think were the most influential? How did Hypatia's gender make it difficult for her to teach in Alexandria?
- 3 What was Neoplatonism, and why did some people consider it threatening to the spreading Christianity?
- 4 How did Hypatia die, and what caused her death? What is her legacy today?

PULCHERIA DEFENDS THE VIRGIN MARY

LECTURE 13

In 412, the Roman Empire had been split into two portions for more than a century, and currently each side was ruled by an emperor descended from Theodosius the Great, who had declared Christianity the only religion of the empire. The eastern portion of the Roman Empire was centered in Constantinople, where emperors enjoyed the wealth and power that flowed to this city that seemed the center of the Christian and civilized world. However, in 412, the Theodosian dynasty was in trouble: Emperor Arcadius had died in 408, when his heir, Theodosius II, was only seven years old. The dynasty would be saved by Pulcheria—Emperor Arcadius's teenaged daughter—who would establish a Christian reign and change the way Christians for the next millennium would venerate the Virgin Mary.



HOW PULCHERIA TOOK POWER

Right after Arcadius's death, the palace was governed by the head palace eunuch, Antiochus, who took charge of the orphan Theodosius and his sisters, Pulcheria, Arcadia, Flacilla, and Marina. Antiochus dutifully saw to the education of the children, but he could not protect them from the politics that surrounded the royal court. There were many who thought to gain power by taking advantage of the young children. In 412, however, things changed.

Pulcheria was 13 years old, and though it is hard to believe, this enterprising child took over. She persuaded her younger brother—the titular emperor—to fire Antiochus, and she took personal charge of the imperial family. She would serve as regent for a few years until Theodosius reached the age of 15, and she continued to serve as his main advisor for the rest of their lives.

The young girl was highly religious. When her grandfather Theodosius the Great had established the Roman Catholic Church as the only permitted religion, he united religion and rule. With his action, people believed that God was on the side of the house of Theodosius, and his family claimed to rule with God's blessing. Pulcheria took this association seriously.

The idea that God supported the Theodosian dynasty helped the women of the house of Theodosius rule, because they ruled by the blessing of God, not by the strength of their military power.

Pulcheria used her religious beliefs to consolidate power for her and her brother. She took a vow of virginity and imposed the same vow on her sisters. This was no private resolution; she did it publicly. She went to the great church in Constantinople—the church of the Holy Apostles—and dedicated an altar covered with gold and precious jewels. She ordered that her vow of virginity be inscribed on this altar, and she did it, a chronicler wrote, "on behalf of her own virginity and her brother's rule."

This dedication was obviously a religious act, but it was also a political one. The only way Theodosius II could have any competition for the throne was if his sisters had children. Through them, the Theodosian dynasty could continue, and there were plenty of politically minded suitors eager to marry a princess and get a claim to the throne. Pulcheria used the strength of her very public vow of virginity both to ensure her freedom of action and to secure the throne for her brother and his offspring.

No doubt at his sister's urging, Theodosius gave Pulcheria the title *augusta*, or "empress," which increased the legitimacy of her decisions. In time, Pulcheria would choose a wife for her brother—the beautiful and intelligent Eudocia, who also acquired the title of empress.

Once Pulcheria took power, she organized her court to be a model of Christian life. She brought her brother and sisters together several times a day to recite prayers and passages of scripture that they had memorized. They fasted completely on Wednesdays and Fridays, which must have seemed shocking to courtiers, who were used to lavish meals at all times in the palace.

In 416, Theodosius emerged from the shadows and took official rule of the empire. However, he was a bookish man, interested more in reading and talking about ideas. Pulcheria always remained at his side and behind the scenes, influencing his decisions.



Eudocia

In 414, Theodosius installed a bust of Pulcheria in the Senate House of Constantinople; this was a shocking statement of her authority, because only men's busts had previously been displayed.

PULCHERIA'S INFLUENCE ON RELIGION

At the beginning of the 5th century, there was only one church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and it was in Ephesus, a city sacred to the virgin Artemis, which simply changed its allegiance from one virgin to another. By contrast, by the 12th century, almost all the cathedrals in Europe were dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and more prayers were said to her than to all other saints and apostles combined.

This change began with a controversy between the empress Pulcheria and a newly appointed misogynist archbishop named Nestorius.

At first, Nestorius worked to restrict the influence of the noblewomen of Constantinople. He forbade them to participate in the services of evening psalms and prayers for the dead, and one prominent woman shouted her objections to Nestorius from the women's gallery of the church, disrupting the service. Nestorius responded by attacking even the influential Pulcheria. He attacked her chastity, suggesting she had enjoyed sexual relations with several lovers; then, he removed her portrait from above the altar of the royal church.



Nestorius

Ever since Constantine consecrated *Hagia Irene*, or Holy Peace, in 337, the imperial family attended church at this fine building next to the royal palace. On Easter Sunday in 428, shortly after Nestorius took office, the imperial family slowly walked toward the entrance of the sanctuary as the citizens of Constantinople looked on. Suddenly, Archbishop Nestorius stepped forward and boldly barred the way. Pulcheria demanded entrance, but Nestorius persisted, claiming "only priests may walk here." She responded, "Why? Have I not given birth to God?" He replied, "You? You have given birth to Satan!" And then Nestorius drove the empress from the sanctuary.

This fight was about women's bodies: Are they holy or contaminated? Pulcheria as a virgin (regardless of Nestorius's accusations) claimed her body was holy, just like Mary's virgin body. Nestorius's background emphasized women's bodies as temptations, beginning with Eve. His accusation of birthing Satan drew from their perceived view of Eve as the source of the original sin of lust.

Theodosius supported Nestorius, and the sources don't exactly say why. Perhaps he wanted to reduce his sister's power, or maybe he was just captivated by the priest's rhetorical flourishes.

Pulcheria was furious, but in the next few days, Nestorius went even further. He argued: "Let no one call Mary *Theotokos* [Mother of God]. She was a human being, and it is impossible that God was born of a human." Nestorius's position hardened further as he received pressure from champions of Pulcheria (and the Virgin Mary). He wrote, "I cannot term him God who was two and three months old."

For a few years after the disastrous confrontation on Easter Sunday, the people of Constantinople and the court itself took sides. The emperor Theodosius supported his archbishop Nestorius, while Pulcheria was his implacable enemy. She had acquired a champion of her own, Cyril, bishop of Alexandria, who had gotten into disputes with Nestorius earlier and was ready to gain Pulcheria's support in this fight.

Before Pulcheria's confrontation with Nestorius in 428, Mary's role probably would have remained ambiguous, with people accepting a position articulated in the 5th century by the priest Peter Chrysologus, who preached it was best not to "pry too much into this virgin's conceiving but believe it."

Theodosius called a council—the third ecumenical council—to convene in 431 to settle the question of whether Mary gave birth to God. Although Theodosius was sure the council would vindicate Nestorius, he wanted to keep some peace in his household, so he accommodated Pulcheria and agreed to have the council held in Ephesus, which preserved its respect for virgins as it became a Christian city. In time, people believed that the Virgin Mary lived in Ephesus, though that is impossible to prove.

The council was held at the Church of the Virgin Mary. Chaos broke out as soon as the bishops started to assemble. Nestorius's followers wrote to Theodosius, asking to reconvene the council outside Ephesus, but it was too late. Women of Ephesus marched in the streets supporting the Virgin Mary, and violence broke out.

Even Nestorius finally recoiled from the divisiveness of the issue. In Ephesus, he cried out, "Let Mary be called *Theotokos*, if you will, and let all disputing cease." But it was too late.

Crowds in Constantinople took up the cause, insisting that the emperor banish his protégé Nestorius. Theodosius bowed to popular pressure; Nestorius was exiled, and harmony was restored to the imperial household.

The Virgin Mary was proclaimed once and for all the Mother of God, and Pulcheria was credited with the win. The crowds shouted: "Mary the Virgin had deposed Nestorius! Many years to Pulcheria! She it is who has strengthened the faith!"

Many of Nestorius's supporters followed him into exile, traveling far as they looked for a refuge for their beliefs. On Christmas Day, these Christians celebrated the birth of a human boy who only later took on the mantle of God. In the Roman Empire, under the guidance of Pulcheria, Christians believed Mary gave birth to God, who had taken on her flesh in her womb.

On July 26, 450, Theodosius fell from his horse, and two days later he was dead.

Pulcheria immediately took power. Theodosius's only child had been a girl, and she was married to Emperor Valentinian in the western portion of the empire. There was no logical heir in the east. To prevent any disputes, Pulcheria chose to marry. She selected Marcian, a Roman official who owed his power only to her. She conveyed on him the title of emperor—the first time a woman was to exert that power—and in return, he pledged to respect her vow of virginity.

PULCHERIA'S VINDICATION OF THE VIRGIN MARY

To celebrate her vindication of the Virgin Mary, Pulcheria built churches, and in doing so, she started the shift to a more visible veneration of the Virgin Mary. She built three churches dedicated to the Mother of God in Constantinople. Tradition attributes three shrines—Chalcoprateia, Blachernae, and Hodegêtria—to Pulcheria's foundation.

However, churches without relics of the Virgin Mary would bring no worshipers. So, Pulcheria wrote to the Bishop of Jerusalem, ordering him to send the coffin and shroud of Mary to Constantinople. He claimed that he only had the winding-sheet in which Mary was buried, and he sent that. Pulcheria deposited it with much ceremony at the church in Blachernae.

In the early 5th century, when people went to church, they wanted to put themselves in proximity to holiness, and this took the form of sacred relics—body parts of a particularly holy person.

Tradition held that Pulcheria received an even more valuable relic: the icon (a picture painted on wood) called *Hodegêtria*, which means “she who leads the way.” Purportedly this icon was painted from the living model by Luke the Evangelist.

The idea of the assumption of Mary—that is, she went bodily into heaven, like Jesus, leaving no trace of her body behind—was only made official dogma in the Catholic Church by Pope Pius IX in 1854 and officially declared doctrine in 1950.

The veneration of the Virgin Mary quickly spread to the western portion of the empire, where Theodosius’s aunt Galla Placidia had ruled as regent for her son Valentinian and still exerted influence over her son. Pope Sixtus III, who had been consecrated in July 432, commissioned a new church to commemorate Mary’s newly confirmed status of Mother of God. This church—Santa Maria Maggiore—was the first basilica to be dedicated to Mary in the west.

Rome needed a relic to install in Mary’s new church, and they brought what was said to be a piece of wood from the baby Jesus’s crib. Thus, Santa Maria Maggiore became a church that not only celebrated Mary, but also focused on motherhood and the Nativity, a holiday that was only beginning to be celebrated in the 5th century.

Pulcheria died in 453, and she was named a saint for her work on behalf of the growing church. But the Virgin Empress’s impact on Christian worship continued.



In the 12th century, almost all the cathedrals in Christendom were dedicated to the Virgin Mary, and she was no longer seen as a poor, modest Jewish girl who bowed her head to God's will. Instead, as the 13th-century mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore shows, she rules as Queen of Heaven, next to her son.

Readings

Holum, *Pulcheria's Crusade and the Ideology of Imperial Crusade*.

——, *Theodosian Empresses*.

Teetan, *The Life and Times of the Empress Pulcheria*.

Questions

- 1 How was Pulcheria able to assume such power? How old was she when she took charge?
- 2 What caused Pulcheria to become involved in a dispute over the status of the Virgin Mary?
- 3 What did the council at Ephesus in 431 decide? Why was its location at Ephesus significant to its outcome?
- 4 How did the cult of the Virgin Mary get forwarded during the reign of Pulcheria?

THEODORA RISES FROM DANCER TO EMPRESS

LECTURE 14

In 520, the city of Constantinople (today Istanbul) was the capital and the heart of the eastern Roman Empire. Like all great cities in the ancient (and modern) world, some people enjoyed astonishing wealth while others suffered unbelievable poverty. This lecture is about a woman—Theodora—who rose from the deepest poverty to rule in the palace. Hers is one of the most dramatic stories of upward mobility, and she accomplished it by beauty, brains, ruthless determination, and a lot of sex appeal.



CHARIOT RACES: THE GREENS VERSUS THE BLUES

The huge hippodrome adjacent to the palace was one place where the imperial family interacted with the masses. The emperor could step out of the palace to a balcony overseeing the great racetrack—the site of wild chariot races.

In the 6th century, there were two factions of chariot race supporters: the Greens and the less numerous Blues. Originally, they had been organized to supply items needed for entertainment—everything from bears to musicians to costumes—but the bitter rivalry that began in the hippodrome turned into political power.

In 500, the Greens had hired a man named Acacius to be the keeper of the bears that were used in performances. Acacius died unexpectedly, leaving his wife—a dancer—with three young daughters: Comito, Theodora, and Anastasia.

In addition to sponsoring chariot races, the Greens and Blues arranged theatrical performances, dances, animal shows, and many other kinds of entertainment.

When Theodora's father died, his widow married someone who might take over Acacius's position, but the Greens would not accept him. This left the family with no income and only the beautiful girls as their resources. The girls went to work in the entertainment sector of the city, under the patronage of the Blues, to whom Theodora remained loyal throughout her life. The girls became actresses, which usually included prostitution, and the eldest, Comito, quickly became a high-class prostitute.

Theodora was still young, and, dressed in a little tunic like a slave girl, she waited on Comito as she moved through theaters and entertainment spaces of Constantinople. Apparently, young Theodora suffered from a good deal of sexual abuse. But she survived.

WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS:
36 GREAT WOMEN BEFORE 1400

Procopius tells us that as soon as she reached puberty, her mother put her on the stage, and she quickly became a prostitute. Theodora was a good comic actress and soon became very popular. According to Procopius, she entertained numerous lovers and was scandalously wanton. Her most famous stage performance, which was described in texts for centuries afterward, involved an erotic dance with geese.

Among the most important contemporary writers of mid-6th-century Constantinople was Procopius, who wrote a book called the *Secret History*, which he didn't allow to be published until after his death in 550 because it was so scandalous and insulting to Justinian and Theodora.

During this time, she became pregnant many times but aborted the pregnancies. She bore one son, named John, whom she left with his father to raise, and some sources suggest she also bore a daughter.

Theodora became the concubine of the governor of Libya and moved to North Africa for a while. When he put her aside, she traveled to Alexandria and other nearby cities, where she worked as a prostitute as she worked her way back to Constantinople. There, her fortunes changed forever.



EMPEROR JUSTINIAN AND HIS EMPRESS

In Constantinople, the emperor was Justin, and his nephew Justinian fell in love with Theodora. This took place in about 522, when Theodora was only about 22 years old. Justinian took her as his mistress, and from this moment on, Theodora had no other lovers. The two became a political force in the eastern empire.

As was typical in the great palace, Emperor Justin was surrounded by people jockeying for power, and the most effective courtier was his nephew Justinian, who made himself useful to his uncle, and it paid off as the emperor aged.

Justinian and Theodora married in about 525, when Justinian was about 41 and Theodora was about 23. In 527, Justin formally adopted his nephew and made Justinian coemperor. A few months later, Justin died from an old wound in his foot. Justinian smoothly took power, and he and Theodora moved into the imperial rooms in the palace.



Justinian

The two ruled jointly. Procopius claims that “neither did anything without the consent of the other.” They started their reign with vigor and ambitious plans. They surrounded themselves with new supporters, including a new general who had shrewdly married Theodora’s sister Comito. More than anything, however, they spent money perhaps living so lavishly they could erase Theodora’s early years of poverty and struggle. Procopius claimed the couple bankrupted the land, and there was some truth to that charge.

THE NIKA REVOLT

In January 532, the imperial couple faced their most serious crisis. A few months earlier, some members of both the Blues and the Greens were arrested for a murder that took place in a riot over a chariot race. They were sentenced to be hanged, but two escaped—one Blue and one Green. They took refuge in a church as an angry mob surrounded the building.

Justinian was nervous. There had been a lot of complaints circulating about how much money he was spending, and he could not afford a large-scale revolt. He decided to call for another chariot race in January 532 to quell the tensions.

As Justinian and Theodora stood on their balcony to watch the races in the hippodrome, the crowd's chant changed. Instead of rooting for Blues or Greens, they began to shout *Nika*, which means "Victory." Justinian's gamble didn't work. Instead of distracting the crowd with a race, the emperor provided a setting for the crowd to unite against him.

The crowd began to riot with *Nika* as its rallying cry. This has come to be called the Nika revolt, and it was the most violent in the city's history. For a full week, the crowds revolted and stormed the palace. In the process, they set fires that destroyed nearly half the city, and tens of thousands died.

Some noblemen saw in this riot an opportunity to depose Justinian, and the riot took on a decidedly political tone. Justinian was afraid. He was ready to escape the city on a ship docked near the palace and take enough gold to live comfortably—but Theodora refused. She stirred Justinian's resolve by saying, "Never will I see the day when I am not saluted as empress." Having arrived at the magnificent palace, she was never going back to her old life.

Justinian came up with a scheme, and he exploited the strong political alliances that existed in the chariot racing teams. He sent his popular eunuch into the hippodrome with a bag of gold. The eunuch reminded the Blue captains of Justinian and Theodora's unflagging support for their team and distributed the gold. Surprisingly, the Blues agreed to disband. At a signal, they slipped out of the hippodrome, leaving rebellious Greens to be slaughtered by Justinian's troops.

The chariot racing teams can be imagined as having the most extreme sports team loyalties combined with fierce loyalty to political parties.

LEGAL REFORMS AND BUILDING PROGRAMS

At the end of the riot, Justinian and Theodora were solidly in power, and they turned their attention to various (expensive) policies that dramatically shaped the city and the Mediterranean world. Their first order of business was to rebuild the destroyed city. The most impressive outcome of this building effort was the design and construction of a massive church—the Hagia Sophia, which means “Holy Wisdom,” named for one of the attributes of Christ.

Justinian turned his administrative energies to creating a new codification of Roman law to reconcile seemingly contradictory precedent-setting decisions along with centuries of complicated legal interpretations. The results of this formidable project were published in 50 books called the *Corpus Juris Civilis* (the *Body of Civil Law*). In this form, Roman law survived and was revived in western Europe in about the 13th century. From there, it has influenced Western legal codes through today.

As the contemporary writers claimed that Theodora was involved in all of Justinian's decisions as a coruler, it is not surprising that scholars have seen Theodora's hand in some of the new legislation that emerged from the court. The rulers gave marriage and sexual matters prominent attention.



Hagia Sophia became a mosque when Constantinople was conquered by Muslims in 1453, and now it is a museum visited by millions annually.

The couple turned to regulating prostitution, and perhaps Theodora's terrible experience in her youth informed some of these decisions. A law of 534 addressed prostitution as a serious problem. To address it, child prostitution was banned, and women could not be forced into prostitution. Rape was treated seriously, and according to a law that was remarkably sensitive for the ancient world, women who were arrested and charged with major crimes were to be guarded by other women to avoid being sexually abused by their guards.

In addition to trying to curtail prostitution, the royal couple passed marriage laws that helped women in various ways. Concubines were protected, allowing their children to inherit. Divorce was also regulated. On the one hand, a law reduced the grounds for divorce, but on the other, it allowed women to divorce husbands who were unfaithful.

The couple also passed serious legislation against male homosexuals. Justinian passed a law that said anyone caught in male homosexual activity would be castrated. (The laws did not recognize female homosexual activity at all, so such women were neither persecuted nor even noticed.)

RECONQUERING OLD WESTERN PROVINCES

Justinian and Theodora embarked on one more major—and expensive—venture: They planned to reconquer the old western provinces of the Roman Empire that had fallen away to invading Germanic tribes.

By the beginning of the 5th century, when Justinian took the throne, the old Roman Empire was restricted to the east: the regions of Turkey, Greece, the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, and Egypt. In the west, kingdoms had been established in the rubble of old Rome. The Visigoths ruled in Spain, the Franks in France, the Anglo-Saxons in Britain, the Ostrogoths in Italy, and the Vandals in North Africa.

What caused this rush to reconquer lost territories? In part, it was to recover lost tax revenues; Justinian and Theodora were spending money like water, and they thought the tax revenue of the west would help restore the treasury. Of course, war is more expensive than almost anything else, and that was true for Justinian.

Initially, he had some victories—specifically, in Italy, North Africa, and parts of southern Spain. But the wars were costly and destructive. And the newly reconquered territory could not be held.

By the 7th century, the eastern Roman Empire was known as the Byzantine Empire—a Greek-speaking empire that remained centered in the impregnable city of Constantinople, where people gathered in the great church of Hagia Sophia, listening to mass conducted in Greek.

Theodora died on June 28, 548, possibly of cancer, at about the age of 58. Justinian wept bitterly at her death. Justinian died 17 years later in 565; he never remarried and mourned his wife for the rest of his days.

Theodora was canonized along with Justinian.

By the time of Justinian's death, few people remembered Theodora's early life of struggle, sex, and scandal. Few people read Procopius's *Secret History*, so no one studied the details of the empress's past. Instead, most people remembered Theodora as a pious, powerful empress. This is a story of more than redemption; it is a story of a woman who through her own resilience and strength of character overcame the worst kind of childhood to achieve the heights of power.

Readings

Evans, *Theodora*.

Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*.

Potter, *Theodora*.

Questions

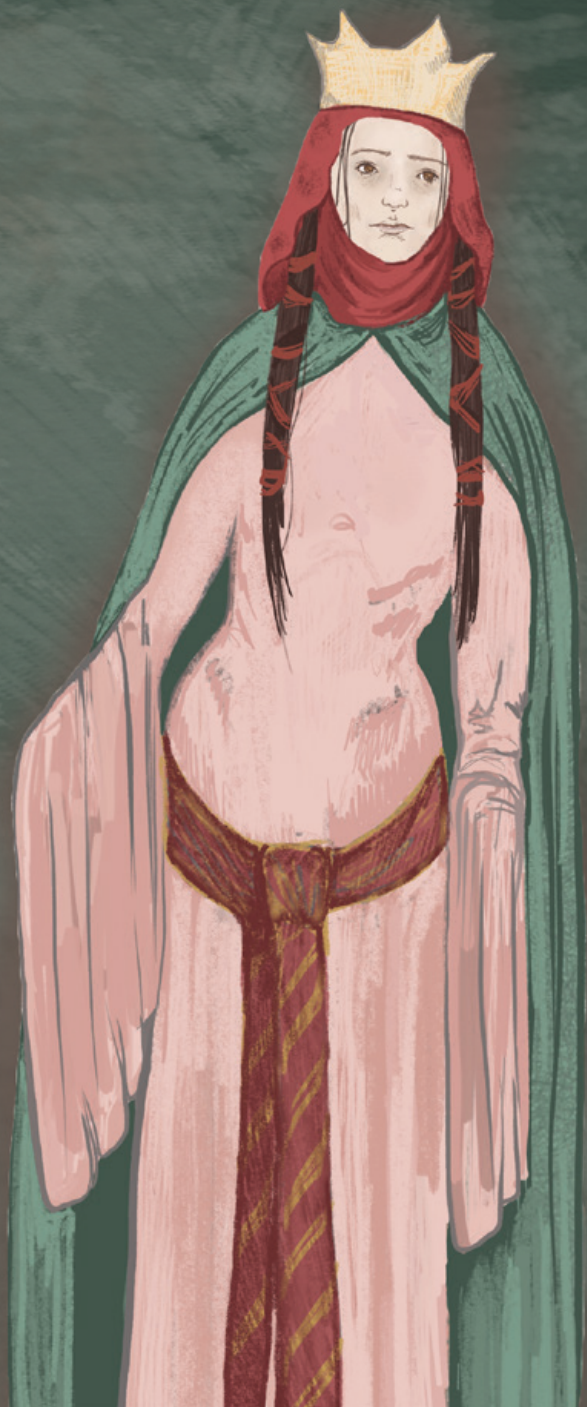
- 1 What was Theodora's childhood like, and how was it related to the entertainment in the city of Constantinople?
- 2 How did Theodora come to marry Emperor Justinian? What were the couple's main legislative interests?
- 3 What was Theodora's role in the Nika revolt, and how did it result in the building of the great church of Hagia Sophia?
- 4 How do the mosaics of Theodora in Ravenna portray her? Does this portrayal show that art is more important than texts in creating historical memories?

RADEGUND FOUNDS A CONVENT

LECTURE 15

In 511, people in western Europe seemed to be drowning in violence. With the fall of the central authority of the Roman Empire in the west, various tribes carved up the land into kingdoms whose borders were constantly shifting, due to almost endless warfare, as kings tried to expand their lands at the expense of their neighbors—or even family members.

In the late 5th century, the Franks, in roughly modern France, were ruled by the Merovingian dynasty, which was murderous and violent. Queen Radegund, the best documented woman of her age, is remembered in the several accounts of her life for the ways she remained above the violence and introduced islands of peace in this warlike world.



THE MERCILESS MEROVINGIANS

In 511, Chlotar inherited his kingdom from his father, Clovis I, who had divided his kingdom among his four surviving sons. Chlotar received two portions: one centered in northern France and the second in southwest France. He spent the rest of his life reuniting the Frankish lands until he had restored the kingdom of Clovis.

In the late 5th century, the Franks were pagans, worshipping a multitude of ancient gods. The ruthless Clovis I, Chlotar's father, converted to Christianity and was baptized in 508.

Chlotar expanded his kingdom in several ways: marrying heiresses to the lands, taking over lands when his relatives died without heirs, and outright conquering. Chlotar acquired Radegund through this third method.

Radegund was the daughter of the king of the Thuringi, a kingdom in modern central Germany. The Thuringi had in the past offended Chlotar's brother Theodoric. Theodoric enraged Chlotar by describing how the Thuringi had attacked the Franks, taken hostages, and then tortured and killed them. As usual with these Germanic tribes, warfare was personal. Chlotar and his brother rallied their men and attacked Thuringia.



Chlotar

As the chronicler Gregory of Tours described the violent battle, the Franks killed so many of the enemy that the bed of a stream was filled with corpses, and the Franks rode across the dead as if they were a bridge. The kingdom of Thuringia fell, and the Franks annexed the land.

Chlotar took princess Radegund and her brother captive. Radegund was only about 12 years old, but she would never forget the devastation of her land and her family. After all, she had watched as her parents were murdered. A poem she wrote late in life contains some of her poignant recollections:

My beloved father's sister lies stretched on the ground, her
milk-white body outshining the flame-spewing, red-gold glow
of her hair. Ah, the foully unburied corpses have covered the
field, and so the whole nation lies in one tomb.

Catholic Merovingian bishops intervened to bring the girl a little respite from the violence surrounding her. They persuaded Chlotar to send Radegund to one of the king's estates in Athies, Picardy, in northern France. There, she learned to read and write, and she was given a Catholic education.

Radegund read religious tracts, but the readings tended not to be of the Bible; Christians were not to read the Latin texts for fear of misunderstanding. Instead, Radegund read about the martyrs—men and women—who gave their lives for their faith. She read church fathers who urged women to live modest, secluded lives and to embrace chastity and purity. She was particularly taken with stories of female martyrs (such as Perpetua) whose sufferings had been rewarded.

This reflective life changed for Radegund some years later, when she was about 18. She was told that Chlotar was coming to claim her as his bride. The king was in his early 40s and had several wives and concubines. Kings like Chlotar used marriage

By his death, Chlotar would have five official wives and many concubines. It would take the Catholic Church centuries before it could persuade these tribal kings to restrict themselves to one wife.

to cement alliances or just indulge their whims—and Chlotar wanted the young Radegund. As princess of the defeated Thuringia, Radegund could bring some legitimacy to Chlotar's claim over the region.

Not surprisingly, Radegund did not want to marry the murderer of her parents. With a few companions, she fled the court, but soon she was captured and returned to Chlotar.

The wedding was held in about 540, in Soissons, north of Paris, and the capital of Chlotar's kingdom. The marriage was consummated. However, the new queen found ways to practice her religion while discouraging her husband.

The Merovingians, named after a legendary ancestor named Merovech, were known as the long-haired kings, because their long hair was a symbol of the royalty of their family.

During her marriage, Radegund practiced severe austerities. She wore a haircloth shirt under her royal garments of soft silk. The coarse shirt constantly scraped her skin and was a standard for ascetic holy people who wanted to mortify their flesh to help them reflect on a spiritual life. It likely also served to dissuade Chlotar's attentions. In addition, Radegund fasted so much she became severely thin, and in the night, instead of sleeping in the marital bed, she slept on the stone floor.

As her biographer Fortunatus wrote,

People said that the King had yoked himself to a nun rather than a queen. Her goodness provoked the king to harsher irritation, but she either soothed him to the best of her ability or bore her husband's brawling modestly.

It is not surprising that she and Chlotar had no children. The king spent most of his nights in the comfortable arms of his other wives, leaving Radegund to her own devices. The king was enraged with her, but there was nothing he could do to force her to comply with his expectations of queenly behavior.

RADEGUND'S ESCAPE

Radegund spent her time in charitable activities outside the confines of the royal palace. The queen gave much charity to the poor; whenever she received a portion of money that was due to her high rank, she gave it away. She built a hospital at Athies for poor women, and she personally worked there.

Needless to say, Radegund became popular with the people and the churchmen. The king couldn't seem to object to her resistance to him because she claimed religious purpose rather than personal animosity. However, this marital truce would not last.

In about 546, Chlotar killed Radegund's brother. The king was probably making sure that there would be no claimant on the throne of Thuringia, but Radegund was devastated. In her poem on the fall of Thuringia, she writes of her feelings of guilt at her beloved brother's death, because she persuaded him to stay with her at court rather than flee to join a cousin.

This was the final straw for her marriage. She could no longer stay with the husband who had killed her family. This time, however, her flight was better planned and more successful.

Allowing Chlotar to think she would be returning soon, Radegund fled to Noyon, where she asked the bishop to consecrate her as a deaconess, which would essentially make her a nun. The bishop faced two serious problems consecrating Radegund: Married women were not allowed to be consecrated as nuns while their husbands were still alive, and Chlotar's armed noblemen had appeared and threatened to drag the bishop from the altar to keep him from giving Radegund the veil.

While the bishop was torn, Radegund took matters into her own hands. She entered the sacristy—the room in the church that contained the vestments for the priests—and put on the robes of a monk. She then came to the altar and placed her rich queenly robes and jewels

on the altar, donating them to the church. She then demanded the bishop consecrate her, and he did. Radegund was free to roam at will, at least for a while.

Late in her life, she wrote a letter to French bishops in which she explained her thoughts as she fled from her husband:

I asked myself, with all the ardor of which I am capable, how I could best forward the cause of other women, and how ... my own personal desire might be of advantage to my sisters.

She decided to found a convent for nuns that would serve as a peaceful sanctuary for women in this violent age.

From Noyon, Radegund traveled to Tours to visit Saint Martin's tomb. But Chlotar followed her to Tours with Bishop Germanus of Paris to try to get her back. One of Radegund's biographers—a nun in her convent—wrote of the panic Radegund felt when she heard Chlotar wanted her returned. She said that she would kill herself rather than to be returned to Chlotar. She fled ahead of him to Poitiers, to the shrine of Saint Hilary, the 4th-century bishop of Poitiers.

The current basilica dedicated to Saint Martin was built starting in the 19th century after the original was destroyed during the French Revolution.



Perhaps she was looking for a miracle to save her from her husband. If so, she got one.

Bishop Germanus had persuaded Chlotar that now in his old age the king should think about the next life rather than this one, so he helped Chlotar agree to donate new buildings for Radegund's monastery of Notre Dame ("Our Lady") to be erected in Poitiers. Radegund rejoiced that she was free.

After the king's death in 561, Radegund felt safe enough from him to acknowledge his charity with gratitude. She would live another 26 years in the emotional freedom of her secluded convent.

Radegund established her convent using the rule of Caesaria, the abbess of Saint Jean in Arles, the first female monastery in Gaul. This rule was a collection of 41 articles provided for all aspects of life in Radegund's new convent.

About 200 women entered into the convent, and together they established a communal life that would mark all medieval monasteries that would be an essential feature of medieval life for the next millennium.

RADEGUND'S RELIC HUNT

Despite her cloistered convent life, Radegund was always aware of the turmoil of the Merovingian dynasty. After Chlotar's death, his four sons fought each other for the kingdom. Several of their wives were murdered in the violence, and Radegund thought France needed some divine protection to withstand the tumultuous times. She began to collect relics of saints to try to bring the remains of their blessings into France. In the course of this relic hunt, she struck medieval gold. In corresponding with some of her relatives who had escaped from Thuringia to Constantinople, she asked for a bit of the Holy Cross on which Christ had been crucified.

The relic arrived in Tours sometime between 566 and 573. The local bishop was jealous of Radegund's power and influence and refused to escort the relics to her convent. She simply recruited other powerful friends, including the bishop of Tours, and the relics were conducted with psalms and candlelight.

In honor of this wonderful relic, Radegund renamed her convent Sainte-Croix ("Holy Cross").

Radegund died on August 13, 587, and she was buried three days later in a chapel outside the walls of her convent of Sainte-Croix. The bishop and chronicler Gregory of Tours described how people mourned and wept for the holy woman as they carried the body to the tomb, which quickly became a site for pilgrimage. Today, it is known as the Church of Sainte-Radegonde in Poitiers, and it still draws visitors.

Throughout her monastic life, Radegund corresponded with her friend Venantius Fortunatus, exchanging poems, thoughts, and condolences. It is through this correspondence that Radegund's writings have survived. Fortunatus would write one of Radegund's biographies, allowing us to follow the life of this remarkable woman—who became venerated as a saint after her death.

In honor of the renaming of her convent as Sainte-Croix ("Holy Cross"), Radegund persuaded her friend Fortunatus to write a hymn to the Cross—which is still sung on Good Friday in France.



venantius

Her biographies circulated widely and became models for other women and other monastic foundations. Throughout the Middle Ages, many women found the monastic life a satisfying alternative to marriage

Readings

Dunn, *Emergence of Monasticism*.

Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*.

Thiébaux, *The Writings of Medieval Women*.

Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*.

Questions

- 1 How did Radegund's early life prepare her for her later contributions to monasticism?
- 2 How did Radegund escape from her marriage?
- 3 What was convent life like? How would this have appealed to some medieval women?

AISHA HELPS SHAPE ISLAM

LECTURE 16

In about the year 610, an Arabian merchant named Muhammad entered a mountain cave called Hira on Mount Jabal al-Nour near Mecca to pray. There, he had a vision. He said the angel Gabriel appeared to him and told him to “recite”—to preach the word of God. Muhammad was uncertain what to do; he was afraid people would think him insane. He remained silent about his visions for three years as he prayed. Then, he began to preach.

According to tradition, Muhammad received many other visions, and after his death, these were collected and became the book of inspired scripture of the new religion. This scripture is called the Qur’an. The religion he founded is called Islam, and its followers are called Muslims. Muhammad has become known simply as the Prophet.



BUILDING ALLIANCES THROUGH MARRIAGE

At first, the people of Mecca rejected the Prophet's message. There was vigorous pagan worship in Mecca, and the residents were not interested in competing religions.

Muhammad was building alliances to forward his new religion, and marriage was one way to accomplish it. Eventually, he would marry 13 wives, all of whom but one were widows—women whose husbands had died in the wars of Islam or women who would help Muhammad solidify the tribes who were joining his movement. One wife was Jewish; another was a Coptic Christian from Egypt.

Only one wife was a virgin; her name was Aisha bint Abi Bakr, and she became one of the most influential women in Islam.

Aisha was the daughter of Abu Bakr, one of Muhammad's trusted advisors. According to the earliest sources, Aisha was betrothed to Muhammad when she was six years old. She continued to live at home in Mecca for a few years until she reached the age of puberty—according to the texts, that was when she was 9 or 10—at which point her marriage to 53-year-old Muhammad was consummated.

While Aisha and Muhammad were still engaged, the Prophet came to the house of Abu Bakr with some news that would change the course of the religion: They were going to escape from persecutors in Mecca and flee to Yathrib, a city about 250 miles to the north.

Aisha's age at marriage has been a source of much controversy for centuries. Some religious scholars take the text at its word and acknowledge that in the ancient world child marriages, including prepubescent consummation, were not uncommon. Other scholars calculate the various years of Aisha's siblings and the dates of some of the identifiable events in the girl's life and conclude that she was actually 14 at betrothal and 17 at marriage.

After the two men left, three months passed before the women of Abu Bakr's household heard the good news that Muhammad had arrived safely.

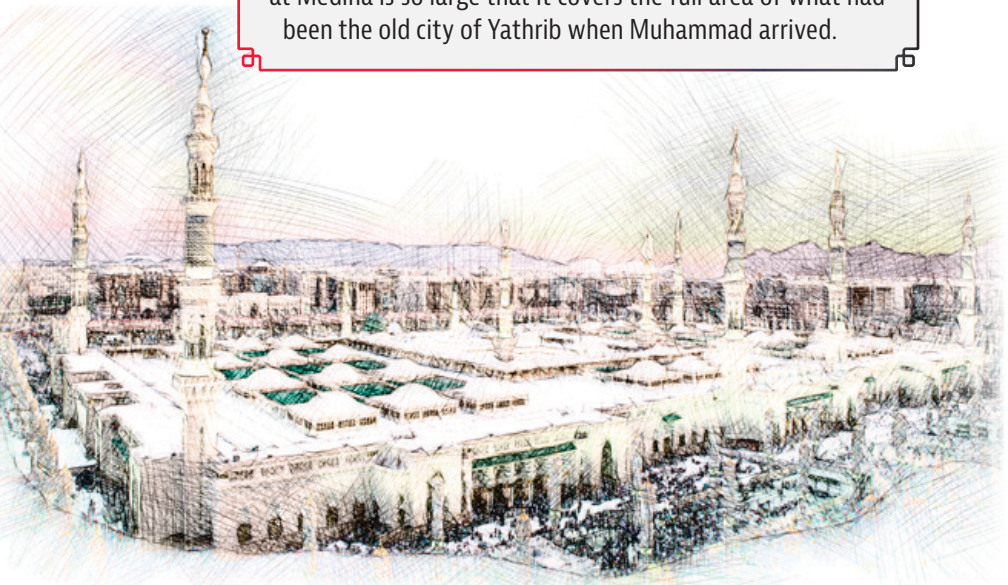
Muhammad's fortunes changed in this year of 622, when he and his small group of followers successfully fled Mecca to Yathrib. This city was later renamed Medina, and it's one of the holiest places of Islam.



When Aisha received word that it was safe to follow to Medina, she moved into her father's house there. Muhammad had begun to build a mosque that would be the center of the worship of the new religion. He purchased some land, and it took him seven months to build the mosque. It was only about 100 feet by 117 feet, but it had all the features that mark a mosque. It was built around a courtyard, and 80 years after the prophet's death, minarets were added from which the muezzin could call the faithful to pray.

Muslims consider Muhammad's flight to Yathrib—called the *Hijra*—the turning point in the acceptance of the new religion. They mark this date by using the year 622 in the Christian calendar as the year 1 in their calendar. The dating system uses AH (*anno Hegirae*) instead of AD (*anno Domini*).

Over time, the famous mosque that Muhammad built has been rebuilt and expanded many times. The current mosque at Medina is so large that it covers the full area of what had been the old city of Yathrib when Muhammad arrived.



After the mosque was completed, purportedly the angel Gabriel came to Muhammad with a message about Aisha: "Marry her, since she is your wife." Her father also urged Muhammad to consummate the marriage.

Aisha's father built a house next to the mosque for the couple. It was a small one-bedroom house, and for most of her life, Aisha lived here in the shadow of the Great Mosque.

As Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula through North Africa, the old Mediterranean world became split between Christians to the north and Muslims to the south. And Islam would spread much farther than that—east to India and beyond.

MUHAMMAD'S FAVORITE WIFE

Muhammad spent time with each of his wives, but Aisha was his favorite. Though they had no children, she enjoyed a special relationship with him, and this closeness gave her a privileged position in Islam.

Muhammad received his visions from Gabriel either alone or with Aisha—never with anyone else—so believers trusted her to recount how the visions occurred. She was also credited with a good memory and the intelligence to remember the words and sayings of the Prophet, and she was instrumental in transmitting them.

Supposedly, Aisha was among the first to memorize the whole Qur'an.

When Muhammad and Aisha had been married 10 years, the Prophet grew ill. He went to Aisha's house to spend his last days with her, and he died with his head resting in her lap. She called his companions to tell them the sad news. They decided to bury the Prophet where he died—beneath the floor in Aisha's house.

As the Great Mosque in Medina was expanded, it encompassed Aisha's house and was built over the Prophet's tomb. The region of his tomb is surmounted by a great green dome. Huge numbers of the faithful visit this site today.

Muhammad's death was only the beginning of Aisha's extraordinary influence on Islam. She lived about 46 years after his death. During that time, the faithful came to her door asking for advice about how Muhammad might have acted in certain circumstances. She intervened in disputes large and small, and her rulings became precedent for the future.

Umar called Aisha "the beloved of God's Messenger," a title that brought with it much respect.

Aisha had an even more formal influence on the future of Islam through her contribution to the collections of Muhammad's words, actions, and habits. These recollections are called hadiths. Considered to be second only to the Qur'an in importance in Islam, these hadiths are used to help understand the Qur'an, inform Islamic laws, and offer guidance on prayer and a spiritual life.

The first sources of hadiths were the companions of Muhammad, and the most important of these was Aisha. She spent so much time with the Prophet during his life, and her longevity after his death made her a significant source of information. The range of Aisha's influence was wide, and the hadiths grew to offer advice on all aspects of Muslim life.

POLITICAL STRUGGLES: SUNNI VERSUS SHI'A

Perhaps it is not surprising that Aisha would be swept up into the political struggles that followed the death of the Prophet. These political struggles created the two major branches of Islam—the Sunni and the Shi'a—whose mutual animosity continues to affect the world today.

One of Aisha's modern biographers wrote, "She was a bridge between the time of the Prophet and the future of Islam."

The Sunni were followers of the first elected caliphs, or leaders of Islam, whom they consider legitimate. The Shi'a believed that the rulers of Islam should be a spiritual head, derived from Muhammad's family.

There were two approaches to the problem of who would lead the faithful after the death of Muhammad. One group believed that a member of Muhammad's family should lead—and not only lead the group politically, but be a spiritual leader as well. In this case, the candidate was Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, married to his daughter Fatima. The group that believes this came to be called the Shi'a, and they based their idea on an incident that happened in 632 CE (10 AH).

According to some accounts of this incident, three months before Muhammad's death, he made his final pilgrimage to Mecca. While they gathered in a grove of trees to shelter from the suffocating heat and perform the noon prayer, Muhammad quieted the company. He then raised Ali's hand and said:



Of whomsoever I am Lord, then Ali is also his Lord. O God! Be Thou the supporter of whoever supports Ali and the enemy of whoever opposes him.

This account appears to suggest that Muhammad made Ali his successor. The Shi'a support this interpretation. The opposing group—the Sunni—believed this incident merely called for believers to respect Ali.

The Sunni believed in a more practical approach to leadership of Islam. Rather than insisting on an heir to Muhammad, they believed the caliph needed to be the best man to guide the community and maintain the unity of the believers. The caliphs did not need to be spiritual leaders, but simply effective rulers.

The Sunni based their first candidate on an incident described by Aisha as Muhammad was dying in her house. She claimed that several times Muhammad said, "Tell Abu Bakr he should be the imam and lead the people in prayer." At the Prophet's death, Abu Bakr became the first caliph.

The tensions between the two groups were established; the violence would come later.

Abu Bakr was caliph for about two years, and Aisha stayed close to him and advised him on various matters, from faith to the law to poetry. When Abu Bakr died, he was buried next to Muhammad under the floor of Aisha's home.

Abu Bakr's successor was another companion of the Prophet, Umar. Umar was a strong, ascetic military man. His armies spread Islam, and his policies consolidated Muslim law and the hadiths. He is considered one of the most influential caliphs. Throughout his reign, he consulted with Aisha. He was a regular visitor to her house, and according to the sources, he took her advice regularly, especially on the content and interpretation of the growing numbers of hadiths.

Ten years into his reign, the vigorous man was stabbed many times by a Persian slave. The transition to the new caliph would not be as smooth as the previous one; on his deathbed, Umar selected six of Muhammad's followers and told them to choose one of them to lead.

Umar also sent word to Aisha, asking for permission to be buried in her house next to Muhammad and Abu Bakr. She agreed, and Umar was buried in the space Aisha had planned for her own burial. There was no more room in the little house for any more burials—or even living. Aisha moved to a nearby house, and the burial space would eventually be the tomb that draws visitors today.

The next caliph was Uthman, who had married two of the Prophet's daughters, so he was close to the Prophet's family. His accession was not as smooth as that of Umar, however, and accounts of his election included Aisha's support. She recounted times when Muhammad had said that Uthman would become leader but warned Uthman that there might be discord during his reign.

THE BATTLE OF THE CAMEL

There was plenty of discord during Uthman's reign—and Aisha would be in the middle of it. The followers of Muhammad's son-in-law Ali had grown strong enough to put forth a challenge to Uthman. Ali's base was particularly strong in Egypt. One leader there sent a letter to Aisha, asking for her opinion of Uthman. Presumably, they were trying to solicit her help for Ali. Aisha left no ambiguity in her response: "God curses the one who curses Uthman." But that did not end the turmoil; instead, the rebellious only grew stronger.

Finally, in 656, Egyptian rebels climbed the walls of Uthman's compound and assassinated him. When Aisha heard the news, she was devastated. But she was practical and accepted the new change for a while. Ali was now caliph, and the Sunni sources say Aisha supported him. Shi'a sources were more suspicious. The Shi'a were right to be concerned, for when civil warfare broke out again, Aisha supported the Sunni cause.

The first battle between Muslims took place in Basra, Iraq, in 656 between the forces of Ali and those who wanted revenge for the murder of Uthman. Ali himself led one group, and Aisha led the forces supporting Uthman. Aisha and Ali tried to negotiate a peaceful agreement, but their followers began committing acts of violence, and the battle broke out.





This conflict is called the Battle of the Camel because Aisha led her forces while being carried on a camel. The fighting was fierce, with many casualties on both sides. As the corpses piled up, Ali's supporters reached Aisha's camel and cut the animal's legs, forcing it to sit down. Ali insisted she not be hurt, and her brother Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, who was fighting for Ali, captured her. The battle came to an end.

Ali forgave Aisha for her role in the battle and gave her safe passage back to her home in Medina. Aisha spent the rest of her days—22 years more—living quietly in Medina, but the consequences of her leadership in the Battle of the Camel would persist. The battle was only the beginning of the struggle between the Sunni and Shi'a.

The Sunni honor Aisha as Muhammad's favorite wife who was a source of great wisdom and an influential teacher of Islam. The Shi'a view her negatively, claiming she used her influence to oppose Ali, and they never forgave her participation in the Battle of the Camel.

Despite these differences of opinion, there is no doubt that Aisha was very influential in shaping the religion of Islam.

Aisha died in her home in Medina on July 16, 678 (the year 58 in the Muslim calendar). She is buried in the Jannat al-Baqi cemetery in Medina, which holds the graves of Muhammad's other wives as well as the grave of Caliph Uthman and other notable followers of Muhammad.

Readings

Brockett, *The History of al-Tabari*.

Haylamaz, *Aisha*.

Hazleton, *The First Muslim*.

Spellberg, *Politics, Gender and the Islamic Past*.

Questions

- 1 How did the new religion of Islam begin, and how did it get established?
- 2 What was Aisha's role in developing Islam during her marriage and during her widowhood?
- 3 What caused the split between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims? What was Aisha's role in this split?
- 4 What was Aisha's main influence in the religion of Islam?

WU ZETIAN RULES CHINA

LECTURE 17

In 626, Taizong became emperor of the Tang dynasty in China, which had been founded less than a decade earlier by a group of rebellious dukes who overthrew the Sui dynasty and would remain in power for nearly 300 years. But the continuity of the Tang dynasty was interrupted for about 15 years when a woman took sole power and introduced her own reign as the Zhou dynasty. Empress Wu Zetian became the only woman to rule China on her own. She was not born to power; she rose to power because she was smart, beautiful, competent, ruthless, and relentless in her pursuit of greatness.



THE CAREFULLY ORDERED CONCUBINES

Wu was born in about 624, and she was “summoned to the court” when she was about 13 years old. This meant that she was recommended to join the emperor’s many concubines to live in the palace. By all accounts, Wu was beautiful according to the standards of her age. Her looks got her into the palace, but that offered no guarantee of success.

The Tang dynasty, with its massive wealth from trade and its international conquests and connections, seemed a historical model for the new China.

The prevailing philosophy in China was Confucianism, which believed in strict hierarchy in society. Everyone knew their place, and the preservation of an ordered ranking would guarantee an ordered world. This principle applied to the emperor’s concubines as well. This was not a random group of women waiting to see who would catch the emperor’s eye; he had a clear sequence for who would reach his bed.

The emperor had one main wife, Empress Wende, who had produced his heir, Gaozong—though by the time Wu came to court, Wende had died. Beneath her, the emperor had four “auxiliary wives,” each with an individual title, such as Virtuous Lady, whom he usually favored with his attention. If he wanted more variety, he would choose from six ladies of the “second grade,” who also had individual titles, such as Luminous Demeanor.

Below them, women did not get individual names; they were generically named for their grades. There were nine “elegants” of the third grade, nine “beauties” of the fourth grade, nine “talents” of the fifth grade, and 27 in each of the three lowest grades: the sixth, or “treasures”; the seventh, “ladies”; and the eighth, “obedients.” Wu entered as a talent of the fifth grade.

All these grades had their own jobs in the palace, and only the top few would ordinarily find their way to the emperor’s bed. The talents, including Wu, were charged with being chambermaids, handling the linens on the beds.

WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS:
36 GREAT WOMEN BEFORE 1400



Apparently, Wu managed to catch the emperor's eye by being forward and witty in his presence. He noticed her enough to give her the nickname Fair Flatterer. She probably became his lover at least a few times, though the sources are ambivalent about this because she later became his son's concubine and the prohibitions against such incest were strong.

In the late 640s, Emperor Taizong fell ill and lingered for a long time. During his illness, he was attended by Wu in her capacity as a talent (chambermaid). Taizong's son, Gaozong, attended to his father during his illness, and during this time, Gaozong came to have feelings for Wu. Taizong died in 649. According to custom, all Taizong's 122 concubines were to cut their hair and enter a convent for the rest of their lives so they would never feel the touch of a lesser man.

In 650, Wu was sent to the convent with the rest of the women. But in 651, she was called back to the palace as Gaozong's concubine, with her seven-foot-long hair intact. From this moment on, she ruthlessly manipulated the palace and the emperor.

By 655, Wu had replaced the empress as Gaozong's lead wife and had killed his other favorite second-grade woman, Pure Concubine. Wu also produced sons and daughters to become the heirs to the dynasty, although she killed some of them.

One of the things that facilitated Wu's rise to power was that Gaozong was sickly. He may have had epilepsy or another debilitating illness. He also may have had a series of strokes during his life. Slowly, he gave his official duties to Empress Wu. At first, she recited his supposed desires modestly from behind a silk screen and then came in front and began to rule in his name. Anyone who dared to question whether her will was the same as the sickly Gaozong's conveniently died.

In 683, Gaozong died, and Wu ruled, first as regent for her son and then in her own right.

There are two main sources for Wu's life and reign. One was written in the mid-900s and is called the *Old Book of Tang*, and a second one, written a bit later, is called the *New Book of Tang*. Both sources focused on the scandalous and violent ways she kept power, listing her victims, the families she removed from power, and her sexual conquests.

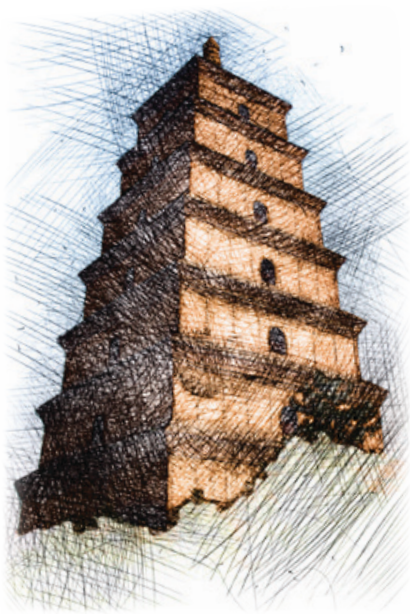
LAWS AND REFORMS THAT SHAPED THE TANG DYNASTY

In general, Wu was interested in breaking up the corruption that derived from old families being in charge and looking out for their own interests. In the military, the empress implemented reforms that imposed a meritocracy on soldiers rising through the ranks. Under the previous Tang rulers (and emperors before), military rank was given as a favor to families and friends.

Under Wu's long tenure, the wars in the Korean peninsula and on the steppe borders with the Turkic tribes went well. The secure lines helped to continue the prosperity of the Silk Road and the economic strength of the dynasty.

While Wu reformed the military, in general she was opposed to a policy of expansion; in fact, she included a proposal for peaceful resolution of conflicts as part of her military policies. To generate goodwill among people on the borders of the empire, she abolished a traditional tax that had been levied on border regions to support the soldiers who guarded the border. Instead, the soldiers were then paid out of general revenue funds, equalizing the tax burden. Needless to say, she was very popular among the residents of these border regions.

Old families had also controlled tax collection in the provinces, and the tax roles were full of inaccuracies and downright corruption. Under the empress's reforms, taxes were collected more efficiently. She also wisely used tax policy to cultivate industries, and she used the new revenue to invest in new infrastructure—roads and bridges—to ease transportation throughout the sprawling land. She also reformed farm taxes to increase production.



In late 652, the Temple of Great Maternal Grace was expanded by the addition of a Scripture Pagoda—a massive building designed to hold the precious Buddhist scrolls safely within fireproof walls. This building stands today as the Great Wild Goose Pagoda, though it was rebuilt by Empress Wu in 704 after some collapse.

Of course, any reforms bring opponents, and Wu made many enemies. To try to figure out what was actually going on in the empire, she added another innovation that was shocking to the Chinese: She encouraged people to get in touch with her directly with complaints about officials or other problems. She set out urns for people to give her information anonymously. These suggestion boxes kept her closest officials from controlling all the communication.

To address the complaints, Wu set up the worst—and probably most effective—of her reforms. She created a ruthless and powerful secret police, who had free rein to arrest, torture, and terrorize anyone who seemed to be opposed to her rule. Often, the secret police exceeded their authority, terrorizing the innocent as well as the guilty, and sometimes the empress claimed ignorance about their activities.

There was no doubt, however, that the secret police were effective and that the empress was complicit in their cruelty.

The old families were unable to mount a successful opposition to her rule.

Some scholars suggest that the work of the secret police under Empress Wu allowed the Tang dynasty to last 200 more years after her death.

ACTIONS TAKEN AS A FEMALE RULER

Wu's reforms were geared to having the Chinese believe that an empress could bring the blessings of heaven to earth just as surely as an emperor could.

She began her program of validating the feminine by shifting an interpretation of one of the most complex and powerful religious ceremonies in Chinese culture—the Fengshan, which was conducted by emperors at Mount Tai in eastern China. During the ceremonies, the emperor reported to heaven and earth on the successes of his reign. This was a rare and bold ceremony; the previous one had been conducted 600 years previously. But Wu insisted it was time for her husband, Gaozong, to conduct it.

The empress planned this ceremony for years, even when her husband was too ill to leave his bed, much less hike up a mountain. By 666, the planning was in place, and the royal household proceeded to Mount Tai. Then, Wu sprung a bombshell: She argued that all the Fengshan ceremonies in the past had been done incorrectly because they had only been conducted by an emperor.

Empress Wu was not interested in helping other women; her overriding goal was to make her own position unassailable.

Wu built on traditional Daoist principles that argued that the world was made of two principles—the male yang and female yin—and that the original Fengshan sacrifices were supposed to recognize both principles. She argued that the female spirits of the earth had been neglected. Even the old, conservative ministers had to agree with her logic, and revisions were made in the centuries-old ceremony.

This was one of Empress Wu's greatest successes: She had inserted a female presence, and her own leadership, into the most venerable ceremony of age-old Chinese religion.

Empress Wu also wanted to elevate the status of women, or at least the idea of women, into everyday events. For example, she decreed that people should mourn women as long as they did men, equalizing the path of the genders into the afterlife. She also wrote biographies of famous historical women to legitimize her own rule, making it seem less extraordinary.

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM INTO CHINA

Another way Wu's desire to validate her rule came in the area of religion, in which she made an influential impact on the future of China. She supported the spread of Buddhism into China.

Buddhism slowly entered China through the Han dynasty that extended from 206 BCE to 220 CE. Because Buddhism is not a religion that requires exclusive worship, it coexisted comfortably with China's traditional religions: Confucianism, which offered a clear ethical order, and Daoism, which offered rituals to appease the spirits of this world and the next.

By the time of the Tang dynasty, there were Buddhist monks and nuns coexisting with Daoist practitioners, while the prevailing official order was guided by Confucius's writings and principles, all of which were rigidly guarded and interpreted by conservative aging scholars, none of whom approved of Empress Wu.

Empress Wu had political reasons to support and strengthen Buddhism, because it would help reduce the power of the Confucian scholars who held such sway in court. In addition, however, Wu had a giant stroke of luck.

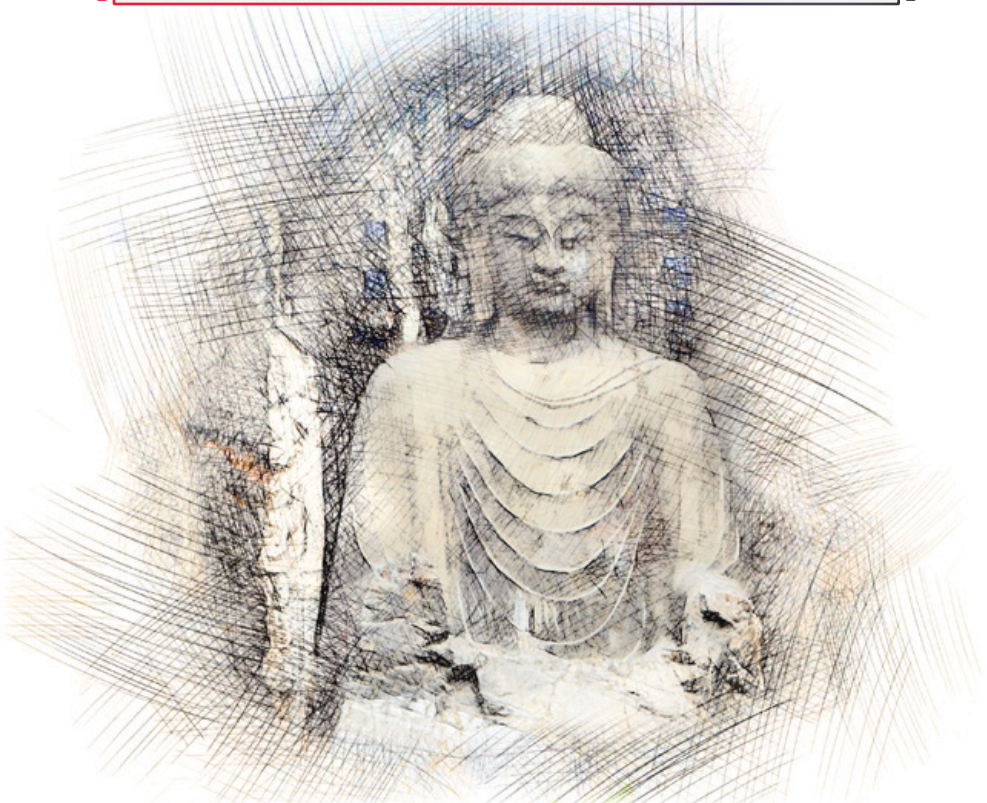
Buddhism was revived in China by the arrival in the 640s of a Buddhist monk, Xuanzang, who had left China 15 years earlier to go to India to bring back Buddhist writings and relics. The monk returned with 657 Sanskrit texts, relics, and statues sacred to Buddhism. He translated the texts in the court of Gaozong, and the new translations gave the empress much-needed validation for an improved view of women.

WU'S SOLO RULE

Wu had ruled in Gaozong's name for decades, but in 683, the emperor died. Wu's son Zhongzong ruled briefly, but his mother arranged for him to be deposed in favor of his younger brother Ruizong. Zhongzong went away quietly, and Wu announced that because Ruizong had a speech impediment, she would continue to guide the dynasty. She was regent, but that wasn't enough.

The form of Buddhism followed in China was Mahayana, and in this school, the faithful believed that sometimes a holy person would agree to be reincarnated back on earth as a bodhisattva—a Buddha that would help others on earth. Emperor Wu encouraged the belief that she was the incarnation of a compassionate Buddha.

To reinforce her position as an incarnate god, she commissioned a great Buddha statue in the Longmen caves, near Luoyang, and this statue was given facial features that resembled the empress. This is the Vairocana Buddha. The caves had been used as a shrine of Buddhism since 493 CE, and today they are a much-visited UNESCO site.



In 690, Wu deposed Ruizong and proclaimed herself the ruler of China. She called herself emperor instead of empress and ruled with that title. Wu proclaimed that a new dynasty—the Zhou dynasty—now ruled. She took the name of an ancient dynasty that had ruled in the time of Confucius and Buddha. She was now in her mid-60s, and she would rule China for the next 15 years in her own name. These years were relatively uneventful. She was popular among the people, and she enjoyed immense support from the Buddhists, who had enjoyed so much imperial support.

Fears of old age and death turned Wu against the Buddhism she had sponsored for so long. She turned to old Daoist magic to extend her life and to advocate for immortality instead of reincarnation.

In 699, Wu was about 74 years old, and she turned her attention to finding elixirs of youth. She established the Office of the Crane, which was charged with searching for potions, pills, and diets that would keep the empress alive and young.

China's first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, took capsules of mercury every day because his medical advisors told him it would keep him immortal. But it probably killed him.

In 704, the 79-year-old empress fell ill, formally abdicated, and retired to her palace at Luoyang, where she prepared herself to die. She returned to careful principles of Confucianism by deciding to be buried with her husband, Gaozong. She died in 705 and was buried in Gaozong's mausoleum, 50 miles northwest of the modern city of Xian. Visitors today still travel to see the tomb of this remarkable ruler.

After Wu Zetian's death, the Tang dynasty ruled for the next 200 years, and her successors killed as ruthlessly as she had to hold power.

Readings

Adshead, *T'ang China*.

Clements, *Wu*.

Dien, *Empress Wu Zetian in Fiction and in History*.

Matsumoto, *The Glory of the Court*.

Questions

- 1 How did Wu Zetian come to power during the Tang dynasty in China?
- 2 What reforms did Empress Wu make when she came to power? What reforms were specifically aimed at women? Was she interested in helping all women?
- 3 Why did Empress Wu support Buddhism at the expense of the more traditional Confucianism?
- 4 What were Wu's interests at the end of her life, and how did she die?

KAHINA DEFENDS NORTH AFRICA AGAINST MUSLIMS

LECTURE 18

In 680, great changes were about to come to the mountain tribes of the Maghreb. Here, independent villagers preserved a way of life that seemed as old as the mountains themselves. But in the 7th century, the armies of Islam swept through the Maghreb and changed everything. As the invaders swept out of the desert, the tribes were led by a fierce warrior—a woman called Kahina—whose memory is treasured today.





THE WILD SETTING THAT PRODUCED KAHINA

In northwest Africa, the Atlas Mountains stretch through modern Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and separate the rich coastal lands from the desert interior. The range embraces valleys, springs, and high pastures, where people have lived for more than 5,000 years.



The ancient Greeks called these tribes Libyan, but today they are often called Berbers—a name they find disparaging and that may have derived from *barbarian*, a name given them by invading Romans. They often call themselves Imazighen, which means “free people.” These fiercely independent tribes still make up more than 40 percent of Morocco’s population today.

At the eastern edge of the Atlas range, in the Aurès Mountains in today’s Algeria and Tunisia, lived a tribe called the Jarawa. Their location led them to be considerably more prosperous than tribes deeper in the mountains. This was because they were near the great olive groves that made this region one of the richest in the ancient world.

Olive trees grow in harsh climates, needing little rain. These magnificent trees can grow and produce olives for a long time; the oldest in the Mediterranean is 2,000 years old and is still bearing fruit.

KAHINA'S TRIBAL LEADERSHIP

In 670, the prosperous Jarawa tribe was led by a woman. Her name may have been Dihya, or some variant spelling of that name, but she is better remembered as Kahina, which means “sorceress” or “prophetess” in Arabic.

Kahina's tribe lived close to the coast of Tunisia, with its great city of Carthage (modern Tunis), which was not controlled by Berber tribes.

In the middle of the 7th century, North Africa was nominally under the control of the Byzantine Empire, based in Constantinople. In the previous century, Justinian and Theodora had retaken these lands, and the Byzantines wanted to hold North Africa—especially the rich farmlands of Tunisia that had been Rome's breadbasket for centuries.

The Byzantine rule was not universally popular. Their governors exacted high taxes from people living in the rich lowlands.

Furthermore, there were a number of religious disputes among the Christians, and the Byzantine emperor did not allow for religious diversity and ruthlessly worked to suppress dissent. So, there were plenty of people in the lowlands who might welcome invaders who offered a better deal.

The situation was different in the mountains, where Kahina guided her tribe. Byzantine rule lay lightly on the mountain people, and they preserved their traditional way of life and independence. Kahina was also personally well placed to serve as an intermediary between Berbers and Byzantines.

Many of the Berber tribes practiced old pagan religions, and prophecy was a central part of their religious practice. Some people—usually women—were able to go into a trance and might prophesy, promising visions of the future.

Kahina gained followers not only because of her position as queen, but also for her reputation as a prophet. But this kind of prophecy was separate from any particular religious belief; prophets could be pagan, Muslim, or any other religion.

According to some sources, her father was a Byzantine and her mother was a Berber. In addition, she had two sons—one by a Byzantine father and one by a Berber father.

She would have spoken both Greek and Berber, so she was ideally placed to negotiate between the two cultures. In ordinary times, she would have ruled comfortably, but the mid-7th century was not an ordinary time. A new threat was coming from the desert. During the early invasions, other Berber leaders took the field, but by the later waves of invaders, Kahina would mount her warhorse and become an ally of the Byzantine army to face the new threat.

MUSLIM INVASION

In 632, the Prophet Muhammad died, and by then, the new religion of Islam was well established on the Arabian Peninsula. His successors—the first caliphs—began to rapidly expand. The greatest of these early caliphs was Umar, close confidant of Muhammad's influential surviving wife Aisha.

Umar took power in 634 and rapidly expanded Muslim territory. He seized Syria and Palestine within a few years and then even conquered the Persian empire. In these wars, he defeated the Byzantine armies in the east, conquering lands that had been conquered by Justinian and Theodora.

In 640, Umar rounded up his armies and turned his attention to North Africa. He quickly captured Egypt in 641 and the following year occupied the coast of most of modern Libya, from Tripoli to the Roman town of Sabratha.

In large part, Umar's success can be attributed to the policies of Justinian and Theodora. Their profligate spending and high taxation had been hard on Egypt. In addition, their ruthless repression of dissenting Christian ideas led local Egyptian Christians not to oppose the Muslim advance.



The incoming Muslim invasions brought with them dromedaries that would change the environment of North Africa.

These one-humped camels made trade across the deserts possible. These animals are uniquely suited for the desert sands—not only because they can store water for days in the fat in their humps and can travel 100 miles without water. Their long eyelashes sift out the blowing sand, and their wide feet prevent them from sinking in the sand.

Umar faced almost no Byzantine resistance during his expansion into North Africa. The Byzantine armies were overwhelmed in the east and could spare no troops for a North African campaign. The only thing that saved the Maghreb in 642 was Umar's inclination. He halted his armies, telling his generals to "leave the distant and treacherous far west" alone. The expansion had stopped, but the North Africans expected the Muslims to return, and they began to prepare.

Umar died in 644, and his successor, Uthman, became caliph. In 647, Uthman ordered the governor of Egypt, Abdallah ibn Sa'd, to march to the west. The general took only about 20,000 soldiers, and he was outnumbered by a coalition of Berbers and local Greek soldiers led by a man named Gregory, who had been the governor of the province under the Byzantine emperor and who now was leading the troops as an independent North African province.

Gregory moved south to confront Abdallah's army in central Tunisia near the Roman town of Sufetula (modern Sbeitla). The battle was a rout; the Byzantine/Berber army was completely destroyed, and Gregory was killed.

At the end of the battle, survivors retreated to the fortified towns and fortresses in the north, closer to the Mediterranean. They left the central and southern regions to the Arabs. Then, a group of North African leaders came to Abdallah's generals, bringing an enormous bribe to encourage the Muslim armies to withdraw.

The account says that the Arab general looked at the pile of coins in front of him and asked the Africans where the money came from. One of them picked up an olive and said: "The Greeks [Byzantines] have no olive trees in their country, and they come to us to buy the oil." This account gave Muslim armies a reason to come back and conquer the land of the olives, but for a while, the North Africans got a reprieve, as the invaders left with coffers filled with coins.

In 656, Uthman was assassinated in Egypt, and Muslims engaged in a fight over the succession. It was during these years that Muhammad's wife Aisha threw her support behind the Sunni group in the Battle of the Camel and a permanent split between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims was established. These internal battles within the Muslim community prevented a concerted effort to invade North Africa. But this was temporary.

In 669, an Arab general, Uqbah ibn Nafi, with a force of only 10,000 soldiers conquered the desert south of the Tunisian mountains. This time, Uqbah intended the conquest to be permanent, so he founded the city of Kairouan about 100 miles south of Carthage. This city was intended to be a fortification to hold the valuable lands of the Maghreb, but it also showed that the focus of this region was no longer the Mediterranean city of Carthage that had dominated the sea trade for a millennium. Now, trade would come from the south through the desert as domesticated dromedaries linked North Africa to Arabia and beyond.

Kairouan means either
"military camp" or "caravan."



Uqbah built a great mosque in Kairouan that remains one of the holiest shrines of Islam.

It took five years to build Kairouan, but even the fortified town didn't deter the Berbers and Byzantines from successfully attacking Uqbah in 683. The army was made up of tribal alliances led by a Berber general named Koseila, and he was joined by Kahina, queen of the Aurès Berbers. Koseila and Kahina killed Uqbah when he foolishly rode into an ambush, and his army withdrew. Kairouan was temporarily abandoned, but the final war wasn't over.

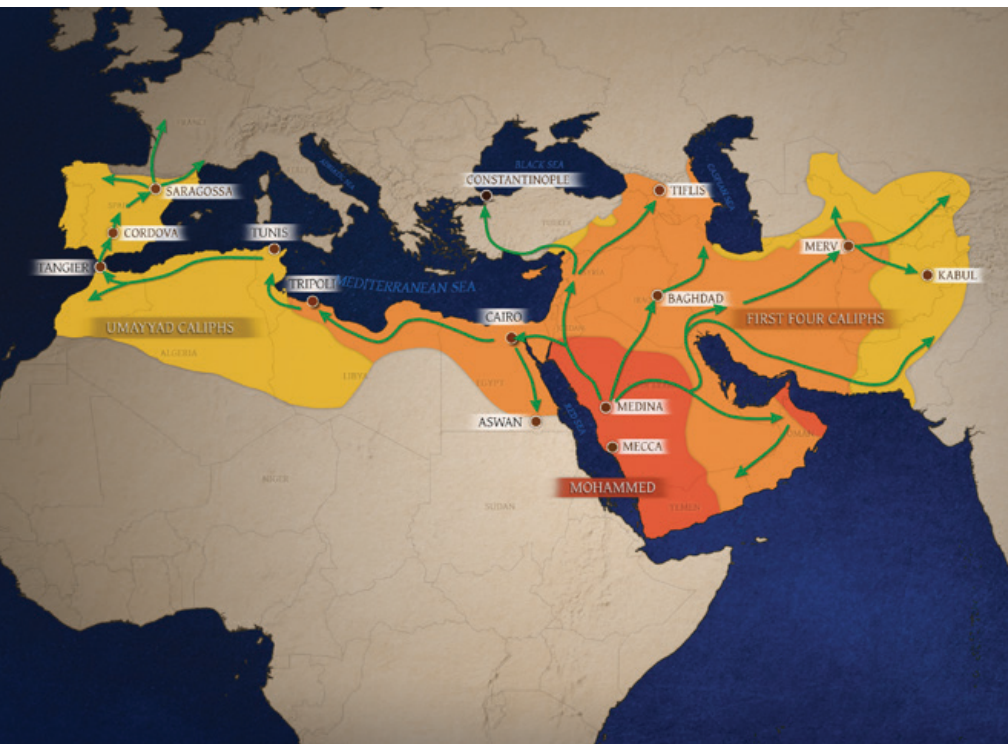
In 686, Koseila was killed, and Kahina took over the leadership of the Berber/Byzantine coalition. From about this date, Kahina ruled a Berber state that extended from the Aurès Mountains to the oases of Gadames at the southern end of modern Tunisia into Libya.

She managed to put together a large army of Berbers and Christians and extended her rule far beyond the traditional tribal loyalties. Of course, she knew the Muslim armies would come again, and invade they did.

There is no evidence that Kahina's opposition to the incursions of the Muslims was motivated by religion. She just didn't want foreign invaders taking over her lands, and she led her people in defense of her homeland.

The Arabs sent a more strategic general this time: Hassan ibn al-Nu'man al Ghassani. Instead of underestimating Kahina's forces, Hassan decided to divide his opponents. He turned his attention to the Byzantines, attacking Carthage, the fortified capital of the region. Byzantine generals waited behind the great walls of Carthage, expecting to be able to wait out the siege because they could be supplied from the sea in Carthage's guarded harbor.

Hassan, however, was relentless. He attacked supply ships and repeatedly sent his soldiers to scale the great walls. Eventually, the Byzantines gave up. They pulled their forces out of Carthage, retreating to Sicily and Corsica to try to resist Muslim advances from these islands. Now Hassan was ready to turn his attention to Kahina's forces in the Aurès Mountains.



Kahina first destroyed her own capital at Baghaya so it could not fall into enemy hands; then, she chose a location to confront the Muslim armies. Hassan followed Kahina to the banks of the river Meskiana in Algeria and prepared to engage her army. However, she had arrived the night before and hid her troops in the mountains. When Hassan rode into the river valley, he was attacked from all sides and experienced a devastating defeat. Hassan and the survivors fled.

Hassan led his surviving troops to the coast near the Tunisian town of Gabès. Kahina and her troops chased him across the desert before engaging another battle outside Gabès. Hassan was again defeated, and in 697, he retreated east to Tripoli.

Kahina and her followers had no doubt that Hassan would be back, so Kahina formed another plan: She wanted to make North Africa so undesirable that the Arabs wouldn't want it. Continuing a long tradition, she asked her people to make a significant sacrifice. She wanted them to burn their crops and their cities—and, most dramatic, the olive trees that brought so much wealth. She knew that once the Muslims saw the wealth generated by the ancient olive trees, they would come back for more. Yet everyone wasn't as eager as Kahina to offer sacrifices for victory.

North Africa's deep tradition of human sacrifice and sacrificial suicide was a way of bringing prosperity to the land.

North Africa maintained the practice of human sacrifice long after it had been abandoned throughout the rest of the Mediterranean world.

The mountain Berbers were fine with a scorched-earth policy; in general, there was always a tension between mountain nomads and settled farmers, and the nomads didn't mind sacrificing the farmers. The settled

Berbers, on the other hand, felt very differently. The farmers decided they would rather cultivate their olives under Arab rule than live free in the middle of a desert. Kahina's coalition of Berber tribes and Byzantines began to fall apart. In fact, many sent word to Hassan to protect them, and others joined his army.

When Hassan invaded again in about 698, he did not face a cohesive army. Now he had to track down the Berbers through the Aurès Mountains, and mountain fighting is always slow. Furthermore, Hassan's dromedaries could not head effectively into the hills; they were desert weapons. He had to use horses and donkeys to track Kahina. But it was only a matter of time.

In 701, Hassan managed to engage Kahina's forces near Gabès, by the coast. The night before the battle, Kahina had received a prophecy that she would lose. Therefore, on the eve of the battle, she told her two sons to save themselves and change sides. They crossed over the lines and quickly converted to Islam to fight in Hassan's army. Kahina's desire for self-sacrifice might extend to trees—and ultimately to herself—but she saved her sons.

Kahina escaped from the battle at Gabès and fled back to the mountains. Eventually, Hassan caught up to her and killed her. He sent her head back to the caliph as proof of his victory. With the death of Kahina, the Berber resistance ended, and the Muslim conquest of the Maghreb was done. The Berber tribes converted to Islam, and a decade later, Berber Muslims would lead the armies of Islam into Spain.

Over the centuries, Kahina—like other warrior women, from Boudicca to the Trung sisters—became a symbol for freedom fighters.

Readings

Raven, *Rome in Africa*.

Sweetman, *Women Leaders in African History*.

Taha, *Muslim Conquest and Settlement of North Africa and Spain*.

Questions

- 1 What was Berber tribal life like? How did the Berbers interact with the Byzantines on the coast of North Africa?
- 2 How did the Muslims invade North Africa? What was the strategic importance of the city of Kairouan?
- 3 What was Kahina's strategy for defending North Africa? What was effective, and what was not?
- 4 What is the long-standing influence of Kahina in North Africa today?

DHUODA CHRONICLES A CAROLINGIAN LIFE

LECTURE 19

On June 29, 824, an elaborate marriage was conducted in the royal palace of Aachen, Germany. The wedding was sponsored by Louis the Pious, who had succeeded his father Charlemagne as emperor of the land. All the great nobles assembled in the stone chapel, and everyone knew this union would join two powerful families with the blessing of the emperor himself. The groom was Bernard of Septimania (a region in southern France), the godson of Louis the Pious. His bride was Dhuoda.







DHUODA'S SECLUDED LIFE

Shortly after the wedding, Bernard was appointed commander of the Spanish border, guarding the lands near his ancestral home in Septimania. Dhuoda traveled with Bernard as they moved to the south, and in 826, she gave birth to their first son. They named him William after his paternal grandfather, who had been a heroic knight during the reign of Charlemagne.

In 829, Bernard received another promotion. He was called back to Aachen to serve as chamberlain to Louis the Pious. This was the highest honor in the king's household. The chamberlain controlled access to the king and oversaw the household, including its finances. This post offered plenty of opportunity for Bernard to enhance his family's position, but it was also a highly political post, and Bernard was terrible at negotiating the shifting political winds that swept through the Carolingian empire.

During this upwardly mobile time for Bernard, he left Dhuoda behind in his castle at Uzès in southern France. She spent much of her time in prayer and study. She was highly educated, and she had access to many books. These included religious writings from church fathers, but also poems and literature.

Dhuoda's life was similar to that of many medieval noblewomen. They were left in charge of the great households as they raised their children to succeed them as custodians of the land.

The local warfare that dominated Europe beginning in the 9th century caused local nobles to build private fortresses that could guard their surrounding countryside from invaders. At first, these forts were built on mounds surrounded by timber and earth, but they slowly developed into the massive stone structures that can be seen today.

Dhuoda spent the years from 829 on mostly without her husband's company. She spent the time managing the castle and focused her attention on raising her son, William.

Throughout her isolation, she wrote no word of complaint. Instead, she followed the fortunes of her husband, writing, "I rejoice in his campaigns." She must have heard rumors of Bernard's behavior, because scandals about disloyalty to his lord and sexual escapades swirled around him, but she devoted herself to study, prayer, and her son William.

Like many women of the time, Dhuoda was swept up in the violence of the age, but she set herself apart with her writings, which give us a rare glimpse into the mind and emotions of a Carolingian woman. In the midst of her family's trials, she wrote a poignant book of instruction for her son.

THE COURT OF LOUIS THE PIOUS

When Bernard arrived at Aachen in 829, the political situation in Louis's court was complicated. A decade before, Louis the Pious had made provisions for what he hoped would be a smooth succession to the imperial crown. Louis divided his lands among his three sons: Lothair, the eldest, was to receive the imperial crown and be the overlord of his brothers, Pepin and Louis, who received lands in southern France and Bavaria. Setting up this rivalry among three strongly armed sons was a recipe for civil strife.

In 818, Louis's wife Ermengarde died. Louis mourned her for two years, but then his nobles persuaded him to remarry. In 820, the court arranged a bride show, in which eligible noble daughters were summoned to the court for Louis to choose from. According to the contemporary sources, the 42-year-old king chose the 22-year-old Judith, daughter of a lord in Bavaria, who was chosen for her "beauty, intelligence, and musical ability." Less romantic writers suggest that the alliance with the powerful lord on his eastern border also contributed to Louis's choice.

The couple married in the chapel in Aachen, and a year later, Judith bore a daughter, named Gisela. In 823, Judith gave birth to a son, named Charles, who is remembered as Charles the Bald. Now Louis's sons by his first wife had reason to worry. Judith was insistent that Charles be given lands and titles equal to his half brothers, and she worked tirelessly to get all she could for her son.



Judith

In 829, when young Charles was six years old, things came to a head. This was the year Bernard came to Aachen to serve Louis as his chief of staff. Did Louis bring Bernard to help support Judith and her son? Did Judith bring him to offer her military support? We don't know exactly, because it would have taken a better man and more skilled politician than Bernard to negotiate this tricky situation, and Bernard was neither a good nor skilled man.

After 829, none of the chroniclers has anything good to say about Bernard. Even if we allow for the sources having been written by Bernard's political enemies, he doesn't come out well.

DHUODA'S MANUAL

Some months after his arrival at court, Bernard was accused of committing adultery with Louis's wife, Judith. Some even suggested that he was the father of her son. The rumors may have been false, but they served as the catalyst for Louis's sons to engage in a war against their father—and against their stepmother, her son Charles, and Bernard.

The rapidly shifting political alliances during the next few years of civil warfare—through the 830s—brought immense suffering to Bernard's extended family as he kept trying to ally with a winning side and instead gained a reputation for treachery and disloyalty to whatever lord he backed at any given moment.

During the Middle Ages, the politics were very personal; families were linked together in innocence and guilt.

When Louis's eldest son, Lothair, managed to gain the upper hand, he had Bernard's brother blinded and placed in a monastery in Italy. Later, Lothair captured Bernard's brother and sister: He decapitated Bernard's brother Gaucelm and had Bernard's sister Gariberga drowned in a river.

In about 839, Bernard wisely withdrew to his lands in the south and to his fortified castle at Uzès, which had been carefully tended by Dhuoda. He came to know his son William, who was about 13 years old at the time. Then, in 840, Dhuoda became pregnant again.

That same year, Louis the Pious died, and Bernard left to try to once again change his political fortunes. Now he had two sons to try to use as pawns in his political struggles. These boys weren't in the line of succession, but they were valuable as warriors and hostages to guarantee faithful service. Bernard took them from Dhuoda.

As Dhuoda recounts of her newborn son: "Still a babe, before he received the grace of baptism, your lord and parent Bernard ... had him taken into Aquitaine ... by the bishop." Bernard would have taken the infant—who eventually was named Bernard after his father—along with his wet nurse.

Aquitaine was a center in the south of France, Bernard's power base.

In 841, then, Dhuoda was left alone in her castle, bereft not only of her husband but of her two sons. In her pain of loss, she wrote to William—to guide him and to offer him advice to keep him safe. Through pure luck, this precious manuscript written by a 9th-century woman survived through the years, and it was rediscovered and published in 1677. From that time on, the academic world came to know Dhuoda, whose voice speaks to us through the words she printed on the page of her *Manual*, which took her two years to write.

A wet nurse was a servant woman who either was nursing an infant or had recently lost one, so she had milk to sustain a newborn.

Dhuoda's writings preserve a perfect image of 9th-century Europe.



At the heart of Dhuoda's book is the 9th-century assumption that the world is ordered by personal relationships. In relationships that came to be called feudal ties, men bound themselves to their superiors in mutually beneficial associations. This strict hierarchy that was supposed to bring order to society explains Dhuoda's advice to her beloved son William.

Despite Bernard's behavior, Dhuoda insists on William's loyalty to his father, because all the family's fortunes were linked to Bernard.

When a nobleman bound himself in service to a lord, he swore a solemn oath of fealty (that is, to be faithful to his vows and his lord). The nobleman now became the lord's vassal—bound to him for life. In return, the vassal would receive a fief, usually land, that would generate enough income to support the vassal.

Thus, when Bernard received the lands in southern France from Louis, the king expected complete loyalty for life.

Dhuoda next requires her son to be faithful to his lord. When Bernard took William from Dhuoda, he sent him to the court of Judith's son, Charles the Bald, who Bernard was currently supporting. William pledged his fealty and in effect served as a hostage to ensure Bernard's good behavior.

Given Bernard's pattern of shifting loyalties, he knowingly placed his son in jeopardy, but that was the medieval way. Dhuoda said that she had heard that Bernard chose Charles as William's lord, and she reminds him of his duties of loyalty and protection to Charles, as well as to everyone in Charles's family.



Charles the Bald

With clear knowledge of Bernard's bad reputation, Dhuoda reminds William never to let the "madness of infidelity" lead him to misdeeds and never to be unfaithful to his lord in anything. She warns him that a reputation for infidelity in anything brings with it shame.

In addition to loyalty to family and lord, Dhuoda repeatedly reminds William to pray and listen to the advice of priests. She returns to her concern for Bernard when she urges William to pray "frequently and assiduously for your father, and to ask all the levels of Churchmen to intercede for him."

She further urges William to read and acquire as many books as he can, wishing him to find the comfort in wisdom and study that she'd attained. Finally, she wants him to remember her, learn from her, and keep her love for her "handsome and lovable son" firmly in mind. She completed her book in 843; she had it bound carefully and sent to William.

DIVIDING THE CAROLINGIAN EMPIRE ALONG CULTURAL LINES

In 843, surviving sons of Louis the Pious were exhausted by their civil wars and came to the negotiating table. The brothers divided up the old great empire. Charles the Bald (Judith's son and William's lord) received the western portion, roughly France; Louis received the eastern lands, roughly Germany; and Lothair, the eldest son, received northern Italy, southern France, and a strip of land between the two other brothers' lands that extended up across Europe.

The Treaty of Verdun anticipated some important nationalistic developments in western Europe, because for the first time, linguistic differences began to be solidified, and people began to identify themselves with the languages they spoke.



The Carolingian empire was dividing along cultural lines. Charles the Bald took the lands that used a Romance language, and Louis presided over the German-speaking lands. From then on, Louis was known as Louis the German.

Lothair's central lands, the modern regions of Alsace and Lorraine, remained in dispute off and on into the 20th century, becoming a central issue in World War I.

In this division of land that was to end the civil wars, Bernard betrayed his lord, Charles the Bald, and bet on a losing side. He supported Pepin II, the son of the deceased brother Pepin I. Bernard had left his son William in Charles's court as surety for Bernard delivering Pepin II to Charles. Bernard didn't do it, and Charles finally lost patience with his disloyal vassal. In May 844, Bernard was captured and turned over to Charles, who quickly had him executed by decapitation.

Dhuoda seems to have died that same year, perhaps before she heard of the death of her husband, to whom she had been so faithful. It is also perhaps fortunate that she died before she could hear of the fortunes of her beloved William.

Once Bernard was executed, William abandoned his allegiance to his lord, Charles the Bald, and threw his support to Pepin II, as his father had done before him. William continued his father's reckless betrayal until 850, when he was captured and killed.

Thanks to the survival of Dhuoda's book, we can gain a rare insight into life behind castle walls during the violence of the Middle Ages.

Readings

Cabaniss, ed., *Charlemagne's Cousins*.

Garver, *Women in Aristocratic Culture in the Carolingian World*.

Neel, trans., *Handbook for William*.

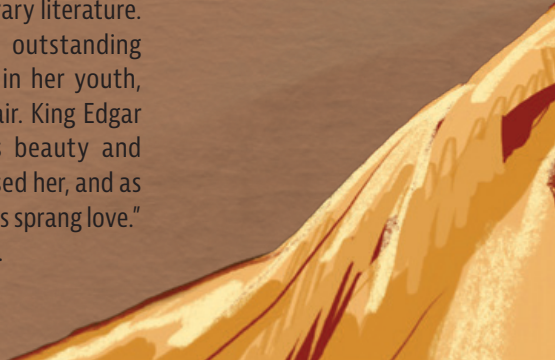
Questions

- 1 What was Dhuoda's marriage to Bernard like? Why do you think she stayed so loyal to him throughout her life?
- 2 What was Dhuoda's life like in her castle?
- 3 Why did Dhuoda write her *Manual*, which has ensured that she would be remembered? What advice did she give her son?
- 4 What happened to Dhuoda's family—her sons and Bernard's relatives? What was the cause of all this destruction?

ELFRIDA RULES ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

LECTURE 20

Elfrida was born in the mid-940s to a noble family in Wessex, perhaps living in a manor house near Devon. She was well educated, which was actually pretty common because noblewomen tended to be more literate than noblemen, who spent their time learning to fight. Elfrida could read and write in English (though perhaps not in Latin), and she was familiar with contemporary literature. But by all accounts, her most outstanding characteristic was her beauty; in her youth, she was known as Elfrida the Fair. King Edgar had heard reports of Elfrida's beauty and traveled to see her in 963. He kissed her, and as a chronicler related, "from this kiss sprang love." The couple married in about 964.







ANGLO-SAXON KINGDOMS

In 955, the island of Britain (excluding Scotland) was made up of a number of individual kingdoms ruled by Anglo-Saxon kings. The most powerful kingdoms were Northumbria in the north, Mercia in the central part of the island, and Wessex in the far southwest. In the previous century, Wessex, under the reign of Alfred the Great, had emerged as a center of learning, administration, and the growth of English common law. With this background, the kings of Wessex gained respect disproportionate to the size of their holdings.

The relationship among the rulers of these kingdoms was complicated in the middle of the 10th century by a wave of outside invaders: the Danes from across the North Sea. These intrepid invaders, called Vikings, raided the coast repeatedly. In 886, King Alfred had made a treaty with the Danes, giving them land and paying them to stay away. However, in the 100 years since Alfred, the payments had fallen away, and the raiding had increased.

The individual kingdoms were not up to the task of keeping the Vikings at bay. They needed a king who might unite the island, forming a large enough entity to handle the new warfare that involved many more people than a handful of tribal members, and they needed many more ships than a single small kingdom might launch. That king would be Edgar, the younger brother of the king of Wessex, who would rule with his wife, Elfrida, the first crowned queen of England.

We know a lot about the activities of Queen Elfrida; there are a number of chronicles from the period as well as saints' lives that give a romanticized view of the events surrounding her life. However, sometimes a woman's reputation—her historical memory—is based on rumor more than fact.

THE RISE OF KING EDGAR

In 955, Edgar's uncle King Eadred died, and Edgar's older brother, Eadwig, became king. The new King Eadwig was only about 15 years old, and Edgar was only about 11 or 12. Nevertheless, Edgar took a prominent role at his brother's court. Eadwig's reign was troubled, however. He engaged in disputes with his nobles and with churchmen. Eadwig's unpopularity led to Edgar's increased support.

Finally, in 957, the nobles of Northumbria and Mercia to the north of Wessex made Edgar king of those regions. Rather than start a civil war with his brother, Edgar divided up the rule of the island at the River Thames, with the north to be ruled by Edgar and Wessex in the south to remain with Eadwig.

In 959, Eadwig mysteriously died when he was only 20. Edgar was the only male-line descendant of Alfred the Great, so the 16-year-old was immediately acclaimed king of Wessex, effectively uniting most of Britain.



Edgar had been raised to be a serious king, with careful attention to the church and the monks who educated him. However, he had one weakness: his love of women. It is difficult to sort out his marital history, because in Anglo-Saxon times, there was a fine line between a wife, a concubine, and a lover. Nevertheless, before Edgar married Elfrida, he likely had two sons by his first wife. These boys were named Edward and Edmund.

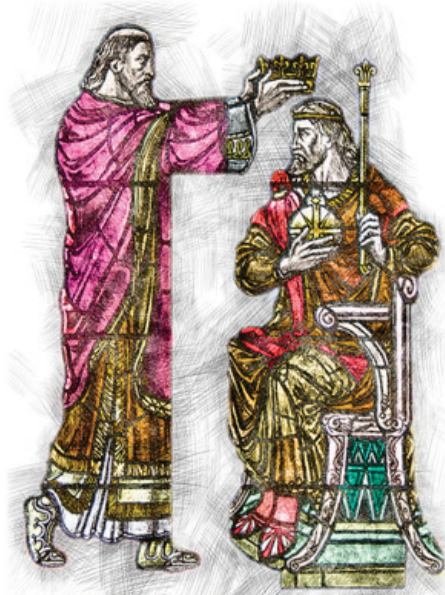
The 12th-century chronicler Gaimar noted that when Edgar and Elfrida were married, both wore a crown, and Elfrida was "given reverence as queen."

Edgar's treating Elfrida as a queen would have been shocking to the Anglo-Saxons, who kept the royal wives very much in the shadows.

THE ROYAL COUPLE'S MAJOR REFORMS

Edgar may have been young—only about 15—when he became king of the northern lands, but he had a clear sense of how to rule a kingdom. And Elfrida was an active participant in his governing; she began immediately to act as a queen. Modern historians identify Edgar and Elfrida's reign as central in developing institutional structures of a unified kingdom.

One of the major areas that engaged the couple's attention was implementing the law. Laws in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms developed slowly and created an enduring legal tradition that has become known as common law, which forms the basis of many of the laws in the United States and England today.



Edgar

Common law had originally applied only to members of a tribe, but Edgar issued a new law code, known as IV Edgar, which is unique in that it expected the laws—including the common law—to apply to everyone in the land. This was the first time that an Anglo-Saxon king saw the whole island as a unified kingdom all under one law. It was a striking innovation that dramatically influenced the future.

Common law differs from statutory law, which is based on mandates passed by a legislative body. Instead, common law recalls a time when the customs of the people were law. Such laws were eventually written down in the 8th and 9th centuries, but their implementation always depended on consultations with the nobles of the land.

Two areas of civil law over which Elfrida exerted specific authority were in determining the validity of a will and in legal cases by serving as a *forespeca*, or legal advocate. She took cases mainly of women litigants, and she seems to have believed that her position as a woman gave her more insight into the cases.

The fact that monasticism in England was in a terrible state led to Edgar and Elfrida's most long-lasting innovation: the reform of monasticism.

The Viking attacks of the previous century had weakened the English church. Many of the great bishoprics of an earlier age had been abandoned. And the monasteries were even worse off. Chroniclers report that Edgar described some old monasteries that had been reduced to crumbling stone walls, and those that still stood were in a serious moral decay. In many monasteries, clerks lived with their wives, and there was no consistency in prayers or ways of life.

There was similar disarray in Europe, but in 910, a wave of reform began on the continent that spread to the island of Britain. Some of the king's advisors promoted this reform, and the king and queen enthusiastically embraced the idea.

The monastic reform consisted of several strands. The first, and most traditional, was using money to endow monasteries. The nobility and royalty had always done this, and Elfrida and Edgar engaged in such foundations with a vengeance. They restored monasteries and built new ones.

Led by reformers in their court, Edgar and Elfrida began to impose on all the houses the Rule of Saint Benedict, under which the monks and nuns took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and spent a good part of their days praying for the good of the kingdom—and the souls of those who had endowed the monastery.

Finally, the royal couple established an administrative structure to help keep the monasteries from sliding back into moral and physical disrepair. Edgar called all his leading churchmen and noblemen to a council at Winchester, which produced a document called the *Regularis Concordia* (roughly “Rule of Harmony”) that established the church reform. Within this document, Edgar as king kept control over all the monks in England to ensure that they did not come under the control of secular lords, and Elfrida was given authority over all the nunneries in the kingdom.

Sometime late in his reign, Edgar introduced a coinage reform that set the pattern for many subsequent English kings. He standardized coins—and older coins quickly fell out of usage. Each coin had a consistent weight and a royal portrait on its obverse side. The reverse bore the name of the mint. More importantly, he set up royal mints all over the kingdom, and this centralization helped him manage the quality of the coins and maintain royal control.

The coinage reform that brought more authority for the central government helped Edgar gain a consistent source of income for the royal coffer. With this money, he legislated for the resumption of payments to the Viking Danes to keep the raids at bay and bring peace to the land. For this, the king became known as Edgar the Peaceful.

HEIRS TO THE THRONE

Late in his reign, Edgar was secure in his sovereignty and felt it was time to make a clear statement of his rule—and of Elfrida's role as his queen. In 973, he arranged an elaborate coronation at Bath, an old Roman city 97 miles west of London.

In Bath Abbey today, there is a stained-glass window depicting the coronation of Edgar that was made as part of the 19th-century restoration of the abbey. It doesn't show Elfrida's coronation, however; this reflects the fact that her reputation deteriorated badly after her death.

This careful coronation was designed to accomplish several things. First, Elfrida was anointed and crowned, the first time a woman was crowned and anointed as queen of the kingdom of England. The coronation also was designed to solidify Edgar's position as ruler of all of Britain. The kings of all the tribes came to Bath and gave their allegiance to Edgar and his queen.

Edgar was not to enjoy his triumph for very long. He died in 975, when he was only in his 30s. His death split the loyalties of the kingdom.

There were two possible heirs to the throne: Edward, who was Edgar's son by his first wife and was about 14 years old; and Ethelred, Elfrida's son, who was only about seven. Elfrida and her supporters wanted Ethelred, while opposing camps supported the elder Edward.

Edward was crowned in 976, almost a year after his father died. Ethelred was treated as Edward's heir, and he and his mother retired to her lands in the west, centered at Corfe Castle in the county of Dorset by the English Channel.

Yet the turmoil of the succession didn't die down. Shortly after Edward's coronation, antimonastic uprisings occurred, and some of the reforms seemed to be slipping away.

In March 978, Edward traveled to Corfe Castle to visit his brother and stepmother. As he sat on his horse in front of the castle, the king was suddenly surrounded by a group of nobles. One grabbed his arm so hard it broke, while another stabbed him. As he fell from his horse, his foot caught in the stirrup and the horse dragged him to his death.

Elfrida's son Ethelred was duly crowned king, and she served as regent for him until he was about 15 years old. No one was punished for the murder, and soon people began to murmur that the queen had arranged for the killing, even though there is no evidence for that. But the rumors only intensified.



Edward

Soon, supporters of the dead king saw miraculous sightings at his grave and began to call him Edward the Martyr, which is how he is remembered today. As Edward's reputation rose, there needed to be a villain to counteract the martyr, and over time—mostly after her death—Elfrida was made to fill that role.

First, the stories claimed that Elfrida ordered the killers to strike; then, they claimed that she greeted the young king with a cup to drink so he would be distracted while the assassins struck. Unfortunately, this is how Elfrida is remembered.

Elfrida lived about another 20 years, guiding her grandchildren. But Ethelred was not up to the task of governing. He was known as Ethelred the Unready, and waves of Vikings overwhelmed his kingdom until, no longer content to collect the bribes—which Ethelred paid in increasing amounts—they carved up part of England itself and put the Danish king Cnut on the throne.

When Elfrida died in about the year 1000 in a convent she had founded, her accomplishments were quickly forgotten.

Readings

Blunt, *Coinage in Tenth-Century England*.

Norton, *Elfrida*.

Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England*.

Questions

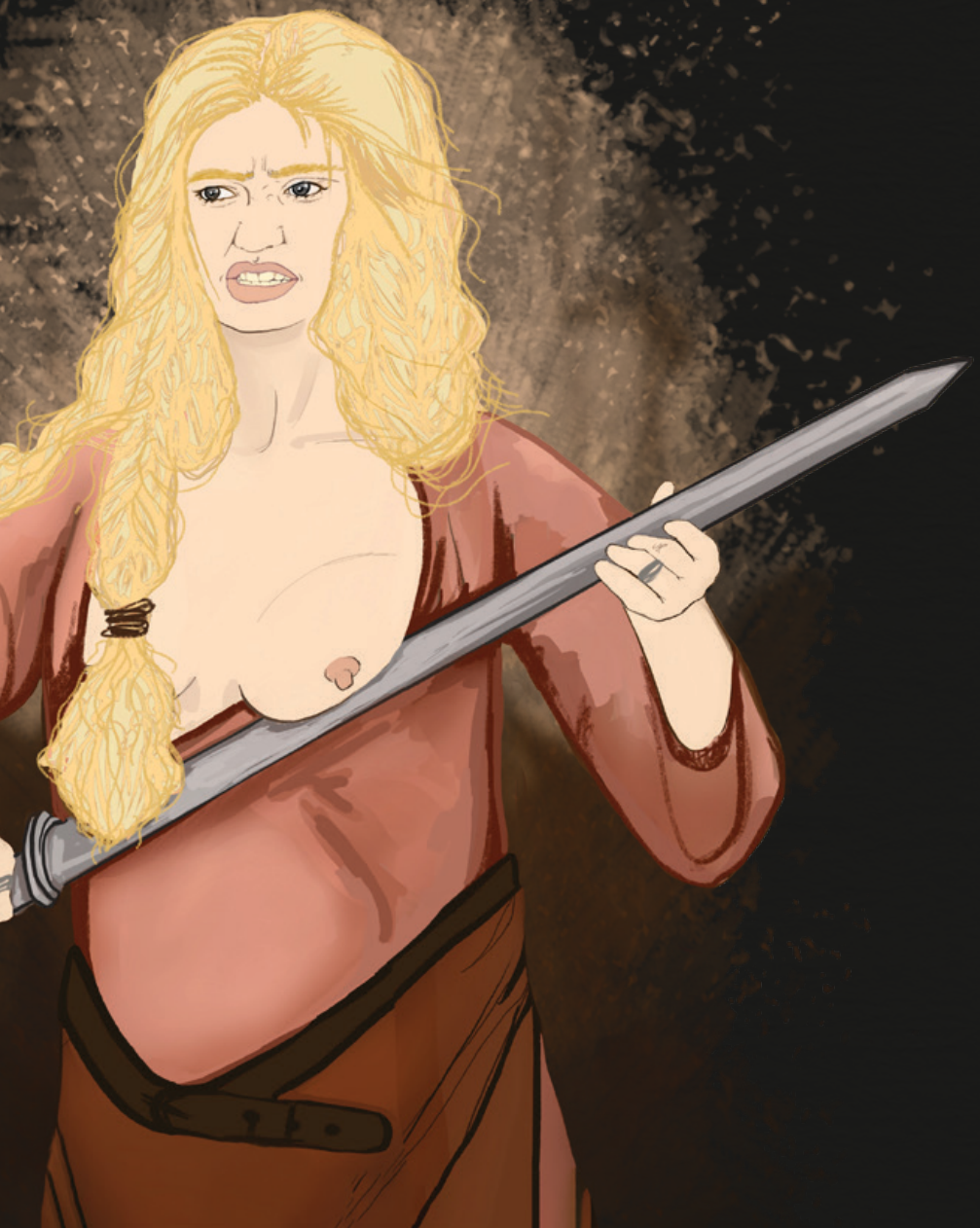
- 1 What were the circumstances surrounding Elfrida's marriage to Edgar? How did she come to be crowned queen?
- 2 What is common law, and how did the royal couple influence it in England? What roles did Elfrida specifically take?
- 3 How did Elfrida and Edgar reform the monasteries in England?
- 4 What is Elfrida's reputation today? Do you think it is deserved?

FREYDIS JOURNEYS TO NORTH AMERICA

LECTURE 21

In about 986, a Viking merchant named Bjarni sailed from Norway to Iceland. As his crew rowed against the strong currents in the stormy North Atlantic, they got lost for several days in the fog. When the weather lifted, Bjarni sailed northward until he saw glaciers shining in the sun. This was probably Baffin Island in the modern Canadian province of Nunavut. Bjarni cautiously stayed offshore; his crew turned around. Once Bjarni made it home, he told his tale of discovering a new land, and the other Vikings ridiculed him for not exploring more thoroughly. Leif Eriksson and his father, Erik the Red, decided to explore the new land.





THE FORTUNES OF THE FAMILY OF ERIK THE RED

Beginning in the 9th century, waves of invaders swept out of Scandinavia and left an indelible mark all over Europe. The short growing seasons of the north made agriculture challenging, and they engaged in long-distance trading. These Scandinavians drew a fine line between trading and pirating and crossed it often. They raided all over the coasts of the British Isles, France, and Spain and from the Baltic Sea down the rivers into modern Russia.

The Scandinavians recorded their deeds in various prose accounts called sagas.

The Sagas of Icelanders details the exploits of the Icelanders from between about 930 and 1030.

The two main sources of information about the travels to North America are *Erik the Red's Saga* and the *Greenlanders' Saga*.

One of the reasons Vikings raided and settled outside Scandinavia was due to feuding and killing at home. The same situation originally led to the settlement of Iceland. Erik's father had migrated to Iceland due to killings in Norway. In Iceland, Erik married a woman named Thjodhild and had three sons—Leif, Thorvald, and Thorstein—and one daughter, Freydis.

In 981, Erik became involved in a dispute with neighbors in Iceland. Over the course of this argument, Erik killed two men and was called before the Icelandic assembly, the Althing. He was found guilty of manslaughter, proclaimed an outlaw, and forced to leave Iceland. He resolved to sail west to find a new land.



He reached what he called Greenland and explored this land for two years. There were fjords filled with fish, and grassy slopes perfect for livestock. Best of all, the land was empty, and he resolved to take it. Then, he returned to Iceland to recruit settlers.

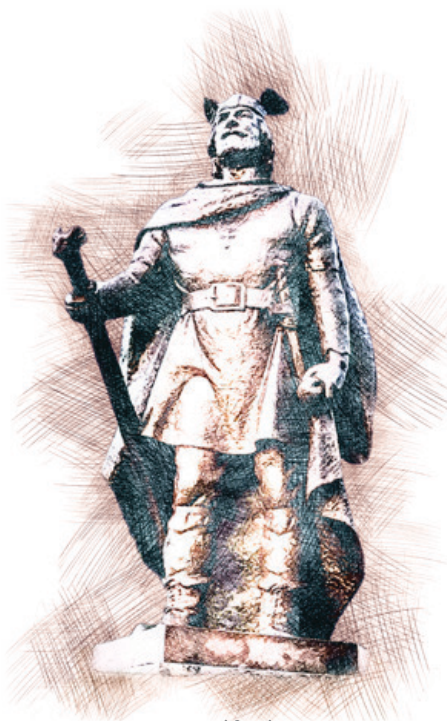
Erik decided to name the land he found Greenland—although it was mostly covered with glacier ice—because he thought people would go there if the land had a good name.

In 986, about 25 ships laden with men, women, animals, and supplies left Iceland to sail for Greenland. Only 14 ships survived the rough crossing, but the colony was established. Perhaps 450 people founded the settlement, and eventually the population would number about 3,000.

Freydis and Leif lived in Greenland, which became the launching point for their discoveries of the New World farther to the west. Freydis married a Greenland farmer named Thorvard of Gardar, who is only mentioned in the sources in association with Freydis's deeds.

LEIF'S VOYAGES WEST

Leif Erikson was interested in the tales of Bjarni's discoveries to the west, and sometime around the year 1000, Leif bought a ship from Bjarni, hired a crew of 35, and sailed to the New World. This became the first of six voyages there, and Freydis took part in two of them.



Leif Erikson



All the Vikings' expansion depended on their amazing ships. The technology of shipbuilding was extraordinary. Excavations of these remarkable ships show them to have been skillfully built of oak and designed to flex with the rough waters of the North Atlantic.

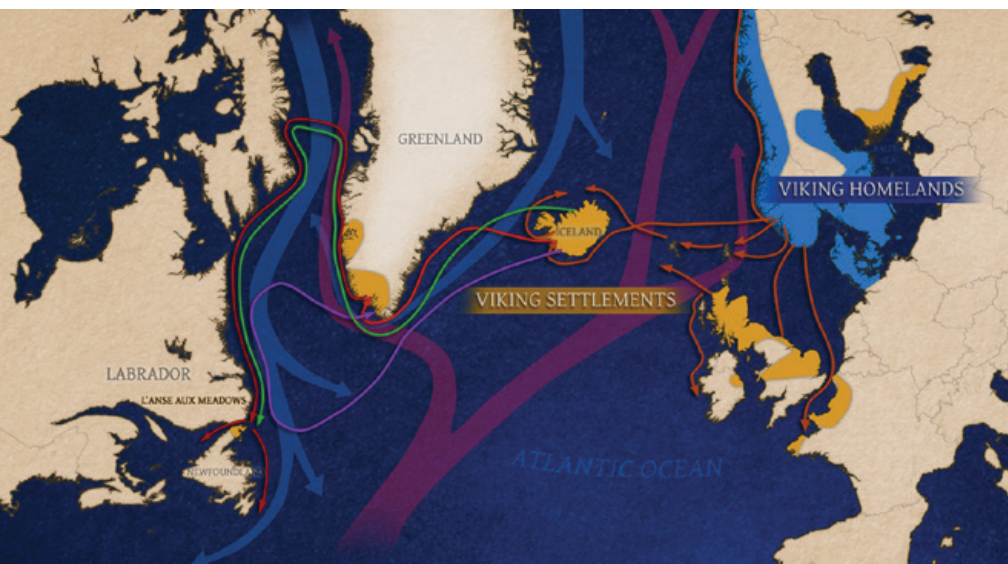
Setting sail from Greenland, Leif found the same lands that Bjarni had described. Sailing down from the north, his crew first came upon an icy glacier land with no grass. Leif landed and named it Helluland, which means "slab-land," probably referring to the great rocks on the shore. Most modern historians consider Helluland to be Baffin Island.

Leif and his men returned to the ship and sailed south. Once again, they cast their anchor and lowered a small boat to go ashore. This was a better land: It was flat and wooded, with white, sandy beaches and lots of woods. Leif called this land Markland, meaning "forestland." This was probably Labrador.

Leif and his crew set off again, and with a strong northeasterly wind, they sailed for two days before landing on a beautiful island. They decided to stay the winter and built sod homes for shelter. They split their party and explored further, and one group discovered wild grapes. Leif named this land Vinland, which, according to the description in the saga, was located somewhere between the Gulf of Saint Lawrence and New Jersey.

The Vikings loaded their ship with grapes and wood and sailed back to Greenland, arriving safely. From then on, Leif was known as Leif the Lucky. Vinland became a destination that drew subsequent explorers, including Leif's sister, Freydis.

WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS:
36 GREAT WOMEN BEFORE 1400



THORVALD AND THE NATIVES

The next voyage to Vinland was taken by Leif's brother Thorvald, whose group discovered natives in three skin boats once on shore. With typical Viking subtlety, they killed all except one, who escaped. The next day, a whole group of skin boats headed toward them down the fjord. These natives shot arrows at them and then fled. One arrow struck Thorvald in the armpit. He died and was buried in the new land. The group spent the winter and then sailed back to Greenland with their boats full of vines and grapes.

It seems most likely that these natives were early tribes of Mi'kmaq, who lived on the coast of Canada in the summer and retreated to the interior for winter. The Vikings might also have encountered the Beothuk people of Newfoundland. Both peoples had boats made of skins, as the sagas describe, and bows and arrows and catapults. But the Vikings didn't distinguish the tribes; they called all of them *Skraelings*, roughly translated as "wretch" or possibly "small man."

The conflict with the natives didn't stop the conversations about Vinland. People began to talk more about the wealth to be had from bringing home precious timber and fine furs.

In about 1010, a merchant named Karlsefni was drawn to the wealth of the New World. According to *Erik the Red's Saga*, in this voyage, Karlsefni took his wife, Gudrid, and four other women, including Erik's daughter, Freydis, and her husband, Thorvard. They apparently planned to settle, for he brought cattle along with him. They landed in Vinland and established a camp for the winter.

We still don't know exactly how the Vikings found their way as they sailed across open water. They apparently could use the sun to determine their latitude, but they also knew currents and flows of seaweed and followed whale trails and the flights of birds. And all of this information was passed on so that others could explore as they did.

Both Gudrid and Freydis became pregnant during their stay. Gudrid came to term first, and she bore a son, named Snorri Thorfinnsson. His family successfully took him back to Iceland when he was three years old, and many in Iceland today trace their lineage back to this famous child. There is no record of Freydis's child—only a mention of her pregnancy.

The settlement peacefully made it through the winter. But in spring, the natives appeared in large numbers, coming to their summer camps by the coast. At first, both groups entered into trade. But the two groups never trusted each other, and when a bull belonging to Karlsefni came charging out of the woods, the natives interpreted this as an aggressive act. They fled but returned in force, prepared for battle.

At first, the outnumbered Vikings were driven back, and they retreated to some cliffs, where they prepared to take a stand. At this point, Freydis came out of her house and mocked the fleeing Vikings.

According to *Erik the Red's Saga*, she said: "Why do you flee from such pitiful wretches, brave men like you? You should be able to slaughter them like cattle. If I had weapons, I am sure I could fight better than any of you." They ignored her and continued to flee.

Freydis tried to follow them, but she could not keep up because she was pregnant. The natives were closing in on her when she came across a dead Viking with his sword beside him. She snatched the sword and prepared to defend herself. When the natives came rushing at her, she pulled one of her full breasts out of her tunic, faced the natives, and slapped her naked breast with the side of her sword, daring them to attack her. The natives were so surprised at this vision that they fled back to their boats and hurried away.

Karlsefni and his men came over to Freydis and praised her courage and credited her with saving their lives. They returned to their settlement and made plans to leave. Then, they returned to Greenland. In this contact, the natives successfully persuaded the Europeans to stay away.

FREYDIS'S NEW WORLD ADVENTURES

However, Freydis was not yet finished with her New World adventures. She embarked on one more voyage. According to the *Greenlanders' Saga*, there "was renewed talk of voyaging to Vinland, for these expeditions were considered a good source of fame and fortune." Freydis decided to organize an entrepreneurial venture.

In the summer, she came to visit two brothers named Helgi and Finnbogi, who had taken part in Karlsefni's previous voyage. They knew the way and were skilled at seafaring. Freydis negotiated with them, suggesting they join her with their ship on an expedition and share equally the profits from the voyage. Freydis asked her brother Leif to give her the houses he had built in North America, but he only agreed to lend them to her.

The group left in about the year 1011. They tried to sail together in convoy if possible, but nevertheless, the brothers' ship reached the settlement first. The brothers moved into Leif's houses. But when Freydis landed, she immediately told the brothers they had to leave the houses because Leif had lent them only to her. Rather than argue, the brothers vacated Leif's houses and moved farther inland. They built their own homesteads but resented Freydis's actions.

While Finnbogi and Helgi worked on their houses, Freydis immediately set her crew to work, cutting trees to take back to Greenland to trade.

Finally, one early morning, Freydis walked over to the brothers' house to talk. Finnbogi said he liked the land but was unhappy about the ill will between them. Freydis pretended to agree, and with a temporary truce, she returned to her husband. When Thorvard asked where she had been, Freydis invented a story. She told him that Finnbogi had beaten her up when she approached him.

Thorvard called his men to him; they armed themselves with swords and axes and went to the brothers' homestead. Freydis joined them. When they arrived, they broke in, seized the men, tied them up, and dragged them outside one by one. Freydis had each of the men put to death as soon as they emerged.

Soon, all the men of the household were killed and only the women were left. None of Thorvard's men were willing to kill the women, but Freydis said, "Give me an axe." Once armed, Freydis killed all the women. She told her followers that if anyone spoke of the killings in Vinland, she would kill them. Her followers agreed to be silent and she paid them well.

Freydis loaded the ship with timber and other goods and sailed back to Greenland, ready to make a fortune in trade goods. When they arrived, Freydis told everyone that the brothers and their wives had decided to stay in Vinland. Freydis and Thorvard settled down on their farm with plenty of money that they had made from their North American venture.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the story of the violence in Vinland spread, and Leif heard about it. He tortured three of Freydis's men until they revealed everything that had happened. Leif said, "I do not have the heart to punish my sister, Freydis, as she deserves. But I prophesy that her descendants will never prosper." The saga says that afterward, "no one thought anything but ill of her and her family."

Readings

Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*.

Jones, *The Norse Atlantic Saga*.

Magnusson and Palsson, trans., *The Vinland Sagas*.

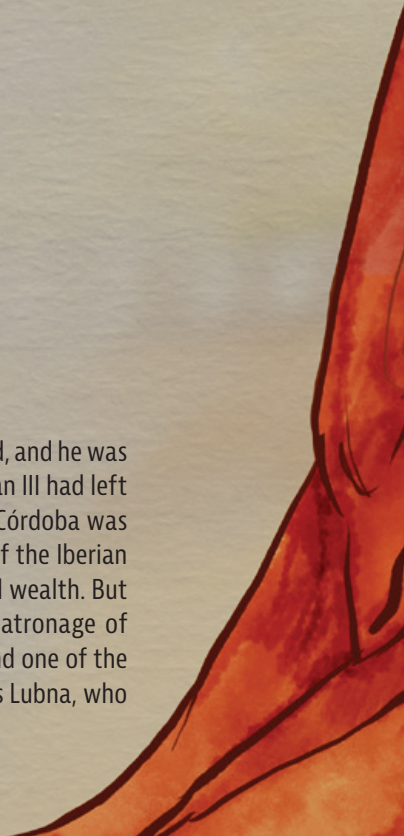
Questions

- 1 What technological advances did the Vikings have that let them sail to North America?
- 2 Why did Leif Erikson and his sister Freydis sail to North America? Where did they probably land?
- 3 How did Freydis confront the native peoples in North America?
- 4 What murders did Freydis commit against other Scandinavians? Why didn't Leif punish Freydis for her violence?

LUBNA OF CÓRDOBA MASTERS MATHEMATICS

LECTURE 22

In 961, the great caliph Abd al-Rahman III died, and he was succeeded by his son al-Hakam II. Al-Rahman III had left a wonderful legacy for his son. The city of Córdoba was the capital of Al-Andalus, the Muslim portion of the Iberian Peninsula, and it was a center of commerce and wealth. But it was also a major center of learning. The patronage of learning led to a growth of scientific inquiry, and one of the most renowned mathematicians of the day was Lubna, who flourished in the magnificent capital.





THE GREAT CITY OF CÓRDOBA

In 711, Muslim Berbers from North Africa had swept across the strait of Gibraltar to invade the Iberian Peninsula. Aided by Arab forces, they conquered most of the peninsula, except for the northwest. In the wake of the conquest, the Muslims established al-Andalus, the diverse land that included Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

The Muslims almost immediately made Córdoba the capital of their new land. Its location on the Guadalquivir River allowed for easy access to the Mediterranean in the south and, from there, communication with the other Muslim lands in North Africa and the east. Ships regularly brought goods and ideas from far away.

Córdoba was one of the great cities of the 10th century. It had a large population; estimates range from between 100,000 to more than 500,000. Writers from as far north as Germany wrote in wonder of the magnificence of Córdoba that drew visitors from all over.

The location of Córdoba allowed the diversity on the peninsula to be enhanced by the new trade that flowed through al-Andalus from as far away as the Muslim Persian empire in the east through Arabia and the caravan routes through North Africa.



The heart of the city was—and remains—the Great Mosque. Today, it covers an area of 590 by 425 feet and consists of a prayer hall surrounded by arcades. Abd al-Rahman III built a great minaret to call the faithful to prayer. By the time of al-Hakam II, the city had increased in population, so one of his innovations was to expand the prayer hall. This structure drew visitors in the medieval world and continues to be an architectural wonder that draws millions of visitors annually.



al-Hakam II

THE NEW CALIPH

The new caliph Al-Hakam II was well placed to take advantage of his father's legacy. He was highly educated, and so much wealth poured into the city that al-Hakam had plenty of money to indulge his love of learning. Al-Hakam's patronage of the sciences brought to the fore an extraordinary woman named Lubna.

We don't have any information about Lubna's youth or upbringing. Most historians assume she had been a slave in the court of al-Hakam's father. When Lubna was a slave, she must have gotten a good education and demonstrated her value as a secretary and scribe. With the accession of al-Hakam, Lubna was free and became the personal secretary of the caliph.

There was a thriving slave trade in al-Andalus, with slaves pouring in from northern and eastern Europe and Africa. These slaves included men, women, and boys who had been castrated to work for the caliph.

Under the reigns of al-Hakam and his father, the number of slaves in Córdoba increased. Royal records show that there were more than 14,000 slaves working directly in the household of the caliph of Córdoba.

Al-Hakam was a particularly passionate patron of learning, and that included learning for women. He set up schools for girls as well as boys to study.

Palace records show that al-Hakam employed 170 women in one neighborhood whose job was to copy books, especially the Qur'an. Some women—like Lubna—did not just copy texts; they studied them and wrote commentaries and annotations on the precious manuscripts.

Al-Hakam himself was a scholar; he wrote a history of al-Andalus. He also used the wealth of al-Andalus to build a library. The caliph selected a woman named Fatima to acquire books for his library. Records show she travelled as far as Cairo, Damascus, and even Baghdad seeking out book dealers to acquire rare texts.

Al-Hakam built his great library in the royal palace compound on the western outskirts of Córdoba. This palace, built by his father, was called the *Medina Azahara*, or the “shining city.” The palace complex covered more than 200 acres and included a dazzling series of palaces surrounding gardens irrigated by rushing waters.

This opulent space was the perfect setting for al-Hakam's dearest project: the building of a library to rival the ones in Baghdad and Alexandria. This new library, filled with scholars, was a jewel of the compound. Records claim that it boasted 600,000 books, and the catalogue alone was 44 volumes long. Fatima had acquired tens of thousands of books, and the scribes in Córdoba—women and men alike—had made many copies.

The *Medina Azahara* was destroyed by fire in the early 11th century, hardly a generation after Lubna's death. The carefully acquired books are gone.

Modern visitors come to see the ruins of this amazing palace complex, though archaeologists have excavated only about 10 percent of the original.

The technological revolution that facilitated all this intellectual activity in Córdoba, with its legions of scribes and copyists, was the development of paper. In the early Middle Ages throughout Europe, books were written on animal skins, called vellum or parchment. These precious pages were expensive to produce. Paper, on the other hand, is made from the pulp of plant material, soaked and pounded flat. The sources of the fibers were almost unlimited, because early paper could be made from everything from wood to rags of cotton or linen.

One gospel book might take the skins of more than 200 calves or many more lambs to produce.

The first Muslim paper mill was founded in modern Uzbekistan, and the technology spread from there to other Muslim lands. Paper mills were established in Baghdad by 793 and in Egypt by 900. The first paper mill in Europe was established in al-Andalus in the early 11th century, shortly after the reign of al-Hakam and his personal secretary Lubna.

Paper was invented in China in about 100 CE. One account of how paper spread from China claims that in the 8th century, Muslims in central Asia captured some Chinese artisans and learned their secrets.

This meant that in the course of her travels to the east, the Córdoba librarian, Fatima, could purchase many more books than might otherwise have been available. Fatima also probably bought reams of paper to take back to the Iberian Peninsula for the 170 women scribes to use to copy the precious books.

These books on paper did not survive the conflagration that burned down the royal palace complex; the earliest-surviving paper book from the peninsula dates from 1035. But the many books that were available in Córdoba stimulated an intellectual flourishing that far outlasted the paper they were printed on. Lubna was at the heart of this flourishing in the mid-10th century.

LUBNA'S INFLUENCE ON MATHEMATICS

As is true with so many women who worked with men in power, it is hard to identify exactly which accomplishments were directly hers, and it probably is a false quest. Lubna worked as the caliph's private secretary, and this was an impressive position, closer to a chief of staff today. This position gave her a good deal of influence on all the caliph's policies.

It is a little trickier to try to tease out more specifics on her accomplishments. But the specific skills the ancient writers credited her with can be used to describe her accomplishments in Córdoba within these skill sets. This is a reasonable analysis because her influence with the caliph would likely have stimulated developments in several areas.

In addition to mathematics, Lubna was also known for her calligraphy—her beautiful handwriting. In Islam, images of all kinds were forbidden as idolatry, so calligraphy took the place of visual arts.

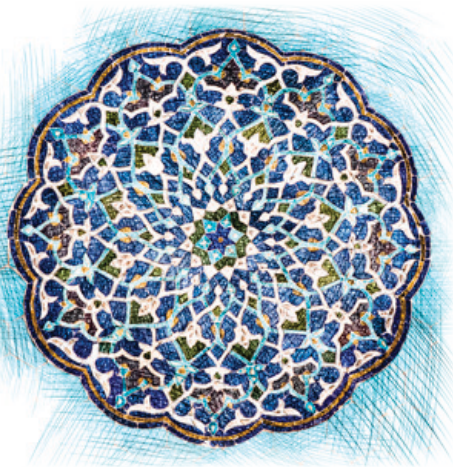
While Lubna was said to be skilled in many of the sciences, her most famous contribution was in the field of mathematics. Lubna read, mastered, and wrote commentaries on the ancient mathematical texts from scholars like Archimedes and Euclid. While she learned the principles of geometry and calculation, she had an advantage over these early thinkers: They were using old Roman numerals—without the zero—for their calculations, while Lubna had learned so-called Arabic numbers, which include the digit zero and is the number system we use today.

In Lubna's Córdoba, complex calculations suddenly became much easier. With the new numerals, multiplication was feasible for everyone, and Lubna wanted to demonstrate that. The sources claim that she walked along the crowded streets in the city and took time to teach children how to do mathematics of all kinds. As she strolled back to the palace, the children followed her, reciting multiplication tables until they reached the palace walls, beyond which they could not go.

The children may have memorized the multiplication tables, but Lubna's mathematical skills went far beyond using these simple tools. The sources say that she mastered the highest mathematics, though they don't say exactly where she acquired these ideas. While she had the classical works from the Greeks and Romans, her greatest source was probably the 9th-century book written by the Persian al-Khwarizmi. His *Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing* is considered the foundational work on algebra, a skill Lubna had mastered.

The word *algebra* comes from Arabic and means "the reunion of broken parts."

Lubna was also known for her skill with geometry. When al-Hakam II decided to expand the mosque at Córdoba, he went with his architects and mathematicians to look at what might be done. He expanded the mosque prayer hall by two-thirds, and did so with carefully calculated geometry. The interlocking circles that mark the expansion were measured by ratios that would be harmonious with the rest of the mosque. Architects and art historians today are still exploring these carefully designed geometric relationships in the mosque. The Arabic numbers and knowledge of algebra facilitated these calculations.



The texts brought to Córdoba by Fatima the librarian and studied by Lubna included influential medical treatises. This kind of support produced the greatest physician of the Middle Ages, al-Zahrawi.

The use of Arabic numerals spread from the court in Córdoba elsewhere on the Iberian Peninsula. A revolution in mathematical computation had begun, and the roots of it can be seen in Córdoba's children cheerfully reciting multiplication tables.

THE END OF THE INTELLECTUAL CENTER

Caliph al-Hakam married a Christian slave from the Basque country in the mountains of northern Spain named Subh and produced two sons. The first died while he was young, and the second became the caliph Hisham II. Subh became very influential at court, making many political decisions. Some texts accuse her of taking a lover, a strong military leader named Abu Amir al-Mansur, but he is remembered by his Latin name, Almanzor.

Al-Hakam suffered a stroke and died in 976 when his son was only about 11 years old. Though Subh was his regent, Almanzor was the real power. Throughout his life, Caliph Hisham II only had the title; he had no power. He stayed within the palace while others ruled. Ancient historians wrote with pride about Almanzor's military campaigns against Christians in the north, and the tone of the court at Córdoba changed completely as the influence of Lubna and the other women faded.

Almanzor even destroyed the great library at Córdoba that Al-Hakam II and Fatima and Lubna had patiently built. The sources say he burned the books of "ancient science" that helped make this Muslim court the forefront of knowledge. Fortunately, most of the texts that had been carefully composed in Córdoba had been sent to Cairo, Baghdad, and other centers of Muslim learning, so they were not lost in the flames set by Almanzor.

Lubna died in 984, just eight years after the death of her enlightened caliph, al-Hakam. And with the rise of Almanzor, the sun set on the intellectual center of the court of Córdoba. The gathering of intellectuals drawn to this center of learning dispersed, and the books were gone.

But what an amazing moment in the intellectual history of Islam—and the West in general: the existence of a diverse court where men and women alike forwarded scientific knowledge.

Readings

Barry, *Homage to al-Andalus*.

Fletcher, *Moorish Spain*.

Hill, *Islamic Science and Engineering*.

Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*.

Questions

- 1 Why was Córdoba well placed to become an intellectual hub in the Middle Ages?
- 2 What was Lubna's job in Córdoba? How did this place her at the center of the intellectual activity in the city?
- 3 What was Lubna's particular impact on mathematics? Why was her handwriting/calligraphy particularly influential?
- 4 What were the medical advances made in Córdoba?

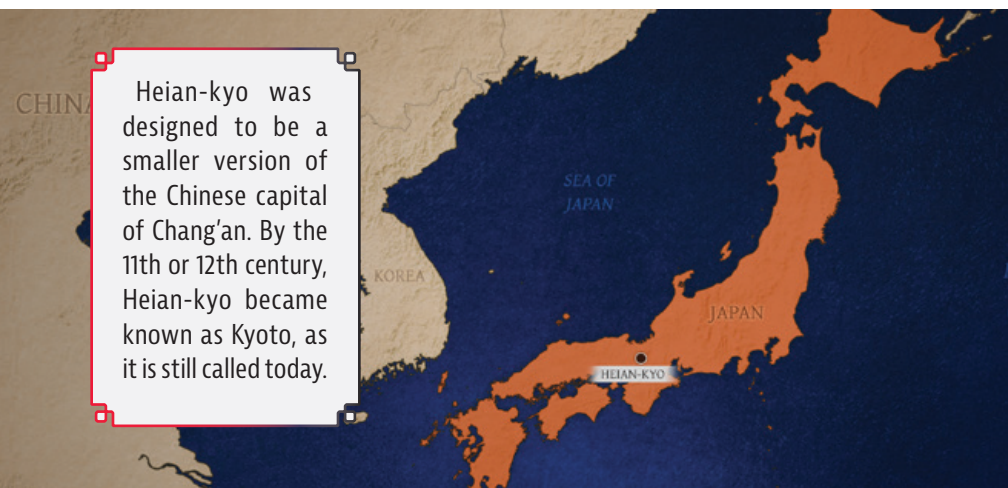
LADY MURASAKI WRITES THE FIRST NOVEL

LECTURE 23

In 794, the Japanese emperor moved his court to Heian-kyo, which began the Heian period of Japanese history.

This period began under the strong influence of the Chinese Tang dynasty. Japan adopted Buddhism, Chinese writing, and many of the trappings of the Chinese imperial court. The court also adopted the rigid Chinese hierarchy of ranks. However, in the 9th century, Chinese instability led Japan to break ties, and Japan started to establish a unique courtly culture of its own. The Heian period marked the peak of an imperial court known for its art, poetry, and literature. In this shifting culture, while courtly men held on to the ideals of Chinese education, courtly women began to emerge as a force that created a Japanese literature and written language.





Heian-kyo was designed to be a smaller version of the Chinese capital of Chang'an. By the 11th or 12th century, Heian-kyo became known as Kyoto, as it is still called today.

THE RISE OF THE SAMURAI

Though the imperial court was opulent and visible, the real power had begun to rest in wealthy and powerful families. This period saw the rise of the samurai, a warrior class whose members the emperor hired to protect his interests outside of Heian-kyo.

These mounted armed warriors were fierce, and during the Heian period, they began to exert real power. Their families essentially ruled the land while giving token obedience to the emperor. This samurai class had ideals and military prowess that would shape Japan's identity for centuries, even into the modern era.

The noble lady known as Murasaki Shikibu was a member of one of the most powerful of these samurai clans, the Fujiwara. We do not know her given name because girls' names usually were not recorded in the genealogies. In time, however, this girl would be remembered as Murasaki, the name of her novel's fictional heroine, and her surname is remembered as Shikibu, which means "bureau of ceremonial," a post once held by her father.

Her father, Fujiwara no Tametoki, was a highly educated and talented member of a midrange branch of the powerful Fujiwara family. He was an accomplished poet whose verses in Chinese were preserved and often read. Tametoki also took great care to educate his daughter Murasaki in poetry and calligraphy.

Sometime in about 994, Tametoki wrote a beautiful poem to Emperor Ichijo that so impressed the emperor that he gave Tametoki the governorship of Echizen province. The 21-year-old Lady Murasaki accompanied her father to this province and stayed there with him for two years, presumably helping him in his household.

In a set of autobiographical poems, she tells of travels with her father in the summer of 996, enjoying his company and intellectual companionship. In that year, her father arranged a marriage for her with another man in the Fujiwara clan: Fujiwara no Nobutaka. He was in his 40s and already had a number of wives, as was the custom among aristocratic Japanese.



Lady Murasaki had one daughter, named Kenshi, who was born in 999. Kenshi grew up to become a major poet in her own right, so it seems her mother taught her well.

In 1001, Lady Murasaki's husband died suddenly, and she lived the rest of her life as a widow. She writes of her feelings after the death of her husband:

I felt both depressed and confused. For some years now I had existed from day to day in listless fashion ... doing little more than registering the passage of time. ... The thought of my continuing loneliness was quite unbearable.

She consoled herself with her poetry and began writing prose at this time. Her famous work *The Tale of Genji* is considered by many to be the world's first novel. The work traces the adventures of her fictional character Genji, the handsome, talented illegitimate son of the emperor.

The Tale of Genji is twice as long as Tolstoy's monumental *War and Peace*. The English translation of *Genji* is more than 1,000 pages and introduces 430 characters ranging over four generations.

The prose alone would have ensured the work's popularity, but it was also lavishly illustrated. From the time Lady Murasaki wrote the book, noblewomen as well as professional artists painted illustrations to go with the tales. When a high-ranking woman, such as an empress, wanted to hear the tale, someone would read the story aloud while she looked at the pictures.

In the 12th century, a famous scroll illustrating *The Tale of Genji* was carefully painted. This scroll was originally 450 feet long with more than 100 paintings. This huge illustrated manuscript shows how immediately popular Murasaki's work was.

The Tale of Genji was Murasaki's most important work, but she was also known for writing a diary—a *nikki*. Men in the Heian court also kept such diaries; they were carefully dated records of weather, nature, and public events, with little personal comment. However, mid-ranked aristocratic women began to write diaries that offered more personal information, such as their feelings and their lives in the courtly households.

The precious remnants of this scroll are in two museums: the Tokugawa Art Museum and the Gotoh Museum.

Murasaki's *nikki*, written between 1008 and 1010, is both a chronological record of her own private life and an account of ceremonies and life in the Heian court. While *The Tale of Genji* offers a romantic, idealized version of court life, her diary reveals the reality of court life.

These writings of women in the Heian court are a remarkable source of information for historians studying the intimate lives of women and men of the period. Political historians trace the rise of the samurai class and the militarization of feudal Japan during this Heian period, but Lady Murasaki and other women open the private doors of the household to us.

THE COURT OF THE JAPANESE EMPEROR

In 1005, Lady Murasaki was summoned to the court to become a lady-in-waiting to the empress Shoshi, a distant Fujiwara relative. Murasaki was likely summoned to the court because of her growing literary reputation.

The Japanese imperial court had adopted much from the Chinese Tang dynasty. The court was dominated by hierarchy, with courtiers receiving numbered ranks. There were nine formal ranks, each with 30 subranks. Everyone was acutely aware of exactly where they stood in this hierarchy.

The same was true for the women, wives, and concubines of the emperor. The women were carefully ranked and lived in a particular area of the palace. These women were also consumed with rank, and if a concubine came from a family of a low rank, the other women might treat her terribly. Murasaki's diary reveals details of the preoccupation with rank within the women's quarters.

For all their hierarchy, the position of women in Heian society was very different from that in other parts of the world. Unlike the imperial dynasties of Rome and China, Japan didn't issue repressive rules regarding women's sexual lives. In Japan, married women lived apart from their husbands, who visited them periodically. Both men and women conducted affairs and took lovers, and this was true even in the imperial palace. The writings of Lady Murasaki and other women of the time wrote of elaborate love affairs.

The courtly society of Heian Japan planted the seeds for the Geisha, who kept similar traditions alive in Kyoto into the modern age. These women were well trained to be charming and attractive to men and to sing, dance, entertain, and indulge in pleasant conversation.

In this courtly culture, a lot of attention was given to beauty—in all its forms, from visual to music to literature, and this appeal to all the senses were woven together. During the Heian period, people considered beauty to be an integral part of a quality person. For Heian Japan, virtue and talent could not fully exist without beauty.

Heian Japanese women wore their gleaming black hair long down their back. Supposedly, the record hair length was 23 feet long!

BEAUTY IN POETRY AND HANDWRITING

Heian appreciation of beauty extended beyond personal appearance. The queen of all beauty was poetry, which called attention to natural beauty. Literature also had a visual component, because it was intimately joined to the handwriting that formed the characters.

When a man or woman wrote a love poem, it was first judged on its handwriting, which was viewed as a window into the soul: Unattractive writing meant an unattractive person. Murasaki described how a beautiful flowing hand smoothed the way to love, and when one woman wrote too lightly and tentatively, she revealed an equally weak personality.

So, courtiers had to learn perfect handwriting. But what characters were they to use? With their answer to this, Murasaki and the women of the court changed the course of Japanese literature.

The most formal and respected characters were written in *kanbun*, a method of writing based on classical Chinese logograms embellished with Japanese symbols. This style of writing was developed in the Heian period and was used into the mid-20th century. *Kanbun* was supposed to be the domain of men, but many literate women learned it, including Murasaki, who was taught by her father. However, for a woman to use the formal *kanbun* script for poetry or letters might draw criticism.



In her diary, Lady Murasaki said that she taught the empress to read poetry in Chinese characters, but because this skill was considered unladylike, she had to do it in secret. Aristocratic women had to pretend not to know how to read Chinese, or their reputations would suffer. Therefore, even if they were skilled in Chinese, women used their own script.

Heian women wrote in phonetic characters called *kana* and characters based on syllables called *hiragana*. These are the basis of Japanese writings today, and they were developed in the Heian court by women writers—not the educated men of the court. Lady Murasaki and the other courtly women wrote poetry in *kana* while men wrote poetry in *manyogana*, the older script based on Chinese characters.

The Tale of Genji contains 795 poems that are integral to the story, which is set in a world where poetry is central to both education and seduction.

Poetry formed the basis of all social interactions. Children learned to write by copying poems, and they memorized poems to acquire the language and rhythm of the poems.

While poetry was the queen of literature for both men and women, prose fiction was considered beneath the dignity of men, who focused on formal poetry or history. Women wrote fictional tales to entertain each other. Murasaki was probably not the first woman to compose prose fiction, but she was the one who composed one of lasting literary value: the famous *Tale of Genji*.

The last record of Lady Murasaki is dated 1013, and she probably died the next year at the age of about 41. She is buried in Kyoto, and people are drawn to her tomb, leaving flowers in her memory.

The Tale of Genji was one of the first literary works to be printed using moveable type in Japan, and there were five printed editions of the work by 1650. The text was first fully translated into English in 1935, and since then, there have been successive translations and abridged editions.

Readings

Kurihara, *Marriage and Divorce in Ancient Heian Japan*.

Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince*.

Schalow and Walker, eds., *The Woman's Hand*.

Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*.

Questions

- 1 What is Murasaki famous for? How is this related to the values of the Japanese court?
- 2 How was the position of women in the Heian court different from that of women in the other empires of the world?
- 3 What was the ideal of female beauty in the Heian court?
- 4 How did women—and Murasaki—influence the written Japanese language?

ANNA BRINGS CHRISTIANITY TO RUSSIA

LECTURE 24

In 980, Constantinople—sometimes referred to by its old name, Byzantium—was the richest city in the West. It was located between the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and it dominated the rich trade that brought goods from as far away as China into Europe. The great walled city was the capital of the old eastern Roman Empire, but the venerable urban center was also a respected symbol of all that was royal. In 980, the throne was held by Emperor Basil II of the Macedonian dynasty, who was successful in extending the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Basil shared the throne with his younger brother Constantine VIII and was the guardian for his 17-year-old sister Anna.



A PRINCESS BORN IN THE PURPLE

Anna was the proud daughter of this imperial family, and from the moment of her birth, she was raised to believe that she was entitled to an opulent and pampered life. She had been born in the special birthing room of the Byzantine emperors, where the walls were made of precious porphyry—a dark red marble that people often referred to as purple.

Anna, like others in her family, carried a surname of Porphyrogenita, which means “born in the purple.” Every time people used her full name—Anna Porphyrogenita—they were reminded of her royal blood, her privileged position, and the high rank of any children born to her.

Anna was also very religious. She was solidly in the tradition of Byzantine emperors before her, who believed that their rule included fostering Christianity, which by Anna’s time meant the Greek Orthodox Church rather than the Roman Catholic Church of the West.

In 980, the two branches of Christianity—the Roman Catholic and the Greek Orthodox—hadn’t yet officially separated, but they were distancing themselves from each other. A few of the differences were clearly seen:

- ♦ The Roman Church used Latin in its services and official correspondence, while the Orthodox Church used Greek.
- ♦ The Roman Church acknowledged the pope as its leader, while the Orthodox Church vested religious authority in five bishops, called patriarchs, who resided in the five major cities of Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch.

The Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches officially separated into two branches of Christianity in 1054, when the patriarch of Constantinople and the pope in Rome excommunicated each other and formally severed the ties between East and West.

- ♦ The Orthodox Church gave more religious weight to the emperor and his decisions than the Roman Church did.
- ♦ The Orthodox Church believed that featuring three-dimensional statues in church was idolatry and insisted there be only flat, painted icons.

The two churches also disagreed on points of theology and informally competed when it came to converting pagans who moved into their spheres of influence.

Anna would have heard of this missionary effort and knew that the tribes outside the direct rule of Byzantium remained mostly pagan, with some Christian converts.

THE STATE OF RELIGION IN KIEV

In 980, the city of Kiev was a bustling frontier city located on the hilly shores of the Dnieper River. This location made Kiev a strategic spot on the trade route linking Scandinavia with the Byzantine Empire in the south.



In the 9th century, Vikings from Scandinavia used their magnificent ships to raid and explore outside of their homeland. These Vikings—called Rus—sailed down the broad rivers of central Europe, at first raiding and then settling.

The latest suggestion for the origin of the name Rus is that it means “men who row” in old Norse.

In about 862, the Rus settled in Novgorod, establishing a kingdom that ruled over the local Slavic population. The relationship between the ruling Rus and the local population was at first exploitive, but as time went on, the two peoples settled down. The Scandinavian Rus adopted the Cyrillic alphabet of the Slavs, even as most of them remained pagan. They began to trade rather than raid, and the wide rivers brought goods like furs and amber from the far north, which were traded for silver and gold from the south.

In about 882, Oleg of Novgorod moved south down the Dnieper River and conquered the city of Kiev. He established a dynasty in that city, which would become the capital of modern Ukraine. The city of Kiev grew quickly as the Rus rulers began to exert their control over neighboring territories, but all this prosperity came in the shadow of the great city of Constantinople, which claimed tribute in exchange for trade.

The religious situation in the Kievan state continued to be mixed. Most people adhered to old paganism with traditional gods. But the missionaries, too, had made inroads, and there was a slowly growing number of Christians in the land.

In 957, Christianity made its way to the ruling family of Kiev—not to all members, but to the grand princess Olga, grandmother of Vladimir the Great. Olga ruled the Kievan Rus from 945 as regent for Vladimir’s father.

Late in her life, when she was probably in her 60s, she embraced Christianity and decided to make a journey to Constantinople to be baptized in the center of Greek Orthodoxy. She embarked on a major diplomatic and religious journey—the first official visit by the rulers of Kiev to the great capital.

Olga was received by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus of the Macedonian dynasty, who described her visit in his writings. Olga appeared before the emperor with an entourage of women instead of men in the forefront of the party. The emperor was so taken aback by this violation of protocol that he arranged for a second reception in which his empress Helena and her retinue received Olga. These formal visits were followed by various meetings and negotiations, which went well and set the stage for increased trade between the two kingdoms.

The emperor wrote that Olga was “the first woman barbarian ruler ever to behold Byzantium.”

Olga was baptized in Constantinople, with the emperor himself serving as her godfather. Olga returned to Kiev, where she died in the faith. She is venerated as a saint in the Greek Orthodox Church today.

Olga's conversion was personal; it had nothing to do with other residents of Kiev. That situation would change when Anna Porphyrogenita would come to Kiev.



Olga

ANNA'S CHRISTIANIZATION OF RUSSIA

Anna was born in 963, six years after Olga's visit, yet she grew up hearing the accounts of the visit that had so captured the imagination of her grandfather Constantine VII; it is likely she read his account of the visit as part of her education.

Everything changed in 980, when Olga's warlike grandson, Vladimir, stole the throne from his brother. Vladimir was a vigorous, dynamic ruler. He initiated an expansion of his borders against the Poles and all along the Volga River. He also claimed five wives and hundreds of concubines.

Along with all this activity, Vladimir was interested in religion—not for personal reasons, like his grandmother Olga, it seems, but because he considered religion a unifying political force. He devoted a hill overlooking Kiev to a temple dedicated to six pagan gods. He began with a Norse god of thunder to appeal to his Viking followers, but he also included gods and goddesses dear to his Slavic subjects.

This unifying appeal failed when some newly strengthened pagans persecuted Christians, even killing some, who became martyrs in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Such violence disrupted the peace of the kingdom and disturbed the king.

The king turned to the Byzantine Empire to advance his expansionist policy. In about 988, Vladimir boldly marched into the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea and captured the fortified city of Chersonesus, near Sevastopol. The Crimean Peninsula controls Black Sea trade into Constantinople, and holding a seaside fortress was essential. Capturing this significant fortress was a blow to Emperor Basil (Anna's brother), so this bold move brought him to the negotiating table.

Today, Chersonesus has extensive ruins that are being excavated, and a beautiful church named after Vladimir stands on the hill overlooking the ruins.

Vladimir wanted an alliance with the Byzantine Empire, and he wanted it sealed with a marriage to a princess born in the purple—Anna. At first, this match seemed impossible. Imperial Byzantine princesses did not marry barbarians, much less pagan ones with five wives.

Basil needed the fortress of Chersonesus, but Anna refused to comply with her brother's wishes. She reportedly said: "I'm being sent as nothing other than a hostage. ... [I]t would be better to stay here [in Constantinople] and die." However, in time, Anna would use these negotiations to forward the cause of the Orthodox Church. So, she agreed to join her brother and an extravagant entourage to sail to Chersonesus.



Anna agreed to marry Vladimir only if he converted to Christianity. Vladimir knew that this Byzantine princess was his ticket to imperial respectability, and a baptism seemed a small portion of the price to pay. Anna's brother Basil required more: Vladimir had to give up the Crimean fortress of Chersonesus and agree to help Basil in his military endeavors. A new alliance was formed between these two states, led by the great cities of Kiev and Constantinople, and it was formed through the marriage of Anna and Vladimir.

Vladimir was baptized in Chersonesus, and immediately afterward, the couple had a Greek Orthodox wedding. Vladimir turned over the fortress to Basil and took his troops—and his bride—on the journey back north to Kiev.

When she arrived in Kiev, Anna first turned her attention to Vladimir's household. He had some five wives before Anna, and they were set aside as a condition of the marriage. Anna set about converting Vladimir's dozen or so children, and they were baptized by one of the priests she'd brought with her from Constantinople. Then, the Christian rulers turned their attention to their subjects.

Vladimir sent his men to the great temple on the hill overlooking Kiev, where he had erected statues to all the pagan gods, and ordered them to destroy the statues. Vladimir followed this symbolic fall of the old gods with an order addressed to all citizens of Kiev. He called for the “rich and poor, and beggars and slaves” to come to the riverbank the next day to be baptized or risk the “wrath of the prince.” The masses of people entered the river while the baptism was presided over by priests brought from Chersonesus for the occasion. This event, which took place probably in 988, became the iconic moment of the Christianization of Russia.

To commemorate the mass baptism of Russian citizens, Vladimir built a large stone church on the banks of the river where he and Anna were supposed to be buried. Today, the site of the baptism as well as the hill of the destroyed pagan gods are marked with statues of Vladimir.

Anna continued to be heavily involved in establishing Christianity throughout Russia. She managed many lands of her own that brought in a substantial income and used these funds to build a number of churches.

Vladimir is considered a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church, though only a few sources note Anna as a saint.

While this Christianization of the Rus was the most important and most transformational moment in this developing kingdom of Russia, Anna brought other important changes to the barbarian kingdom in the north. She strengthened the ties between these two commercial hubs—Kiev and Constantinople—increasing the trade and prosperity of both. Anna also helped bring imperial legitimacy to the bandit Viking rulers of Kiev.

When Anna sent a cohort of Rus warriors to serve her brother, the emperor, this began a centuries-long tradition of Scandinavian guards, called the Varangian guard, serving the emperor in Constantinople.

Anna died in 1011, and Vladimir outlived her by a few years. He married one more time for a political alliance with a German princess. None of his wives brought him the prestige of the Byzantine princess born in the purple.

Readings

Berend, *Christianization and the Rise of Christian Monarchy*.

Dolukhanov, *The Early Slavs*.

Franklin, *The Emergence of Rus'*.

Raffensperger, *The Kingdom of Rus'*.

Questions

- 1 What was the significance of Anna having been "born in the purple"? Consider both her time and the future of Russia.
- 2 What were the differences between the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, and how were these differences important in the history of Russia?
- 3 How did Anna and Vladimir come to get married? What was Anna's condition for the marriage?
- 4 How did Christianity come to Russia?

ANNA COMNENA WRITES A BYZANTINE HISTORY

LECTURE 25

In 1096, the Mediterranean world was about to experience a dramatic event that continues to affect attitudes in the modern world. An army of Christians formed to march east to go to war against the Muslims in what became called the First Crusade. There would be at least eight Crusades over the next 200 years as Christians and Muslims fought over control of Jerusalem and the surrounding lands on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. The First Crusade was a momentous event that was described by a number of contemporaries—one of whom was Anna Comnena, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexius.





ANNA, THE HISTORIAN

Anna was born in 1083, the eldest daughter of Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus and Empress Irene. Like Byzantine princesses before and after her, Anna was proud of her status. She described herself as “born and bred in the Purple”—born in the exclusive purple room in the palace.

Anna was highly educated. In her own words, she “devoted the most earnest study to the Greek language, ... the treatises of Aristotle and the dialogues of Plato” and all the sciences.

When Anna was an infant, she was betrothed to a man named Constantine. At this time, Alexius had no son, so the emperor designated Constantine to be coemperor with him and his heir. This made infant Anna an empress in name. However, this wasn't to last. Four years later, her brother John was born, and Alexius declared John his heir, displacing Constantine (and Anna). Constantine died shortly thereafter.

When she was 14 years old, Anna married Nicephorus Bryennius, a handsome, educated general. She wanted him to become emperor—raising her with him to the imperial throne. When Alexius died in 1118, Anna repeatedly conspired to take the throne from her brother, apparently even to the extent of trying to kill him at her father's funeral.

In the end, her husband refused to back her military plans to overthrow John, so she was left with no choice but to acquiesce. Bryennius died in 1137 while on a military campaign serving Anna's implacable enemy John.



John II

John forgave Anna's treasonous exploits, but she forfeited her estates and was forced into a monastery, where she spent the rest of her life. While she was there, she wrote the *Alexiad*, the history of her father's reign. This work is our best historical source for this period of Byzantine history, and it gave Anna Comnena an immortality that she would never have achieved as an empress.

Anna finished the *Alexiad* sometime after 1148, and it covers the period from 1069 through 1118. It concludes with a detailed account of Emperor Alexius's death from some malady he caught in battles against the Turks.

THE FIRST CRUSADE

The First Crusade was the central event in the Middle Ages that marked the relations between Christians and Muslims into the modern age.

Anna rightly notes that this warfare began with military weaknesses in Alexius's empire:

Alexius saw that the empire was nearly at its last gasp, for in the East the Turks were grievously harassing the frontiers while in the West things were very bad. ... Consequently, the young and brave emperor was desperate.

The problem wasn't that the Muslims held Jerusalem and the surrounding lands on the eastern Mediterranean; they had done so since the early expansion of Islam in the 7th century. For centuries, there had been a balance of power among the three medieval civilizations: the Western kingdoms, the Byzantine Empire, and the Muslim caliphates. Throughout those centuries, Christian pilgrims journeyed to the Holy Lands even though they were in Muslim hands. These journeys were hazardous (as was all long-distance travel), but they were possible. In the late 11th century, this balance of power changed.

In the decades before Alexius came to the throne, the Byzantine army had deteriorated, and the emperor had begun to rely on mercenary soldiers instead of a local standing army—and this was expensive. Furthermore, Islam had gained strength. The Seljuk Turks, a fierce central Asian tribe, had converted to Islam and were on the move. These Turks expanded rapidly, taking the Persian empire and moving west to the Anatolian peninsula (modern Turkey).

The Byzantine emperor Romanos IV Diogenes led an army east in 1071 to stop the march of the Turks, and they met at the Battle of Manzikert. The Byzantines suffered a terrible defeat, and Emperor Romanos was captured. Though he was released after paying a huge ransom, his dynasty was over. This victory opened

up central Anatolia to the Turks, and they expanded rapidly. Anna wrote, “the fortunes of the Roman Empire had sunk to its lowest ebb.” The two emperors who ruled after Romanos were not able to stop the Turks.

Christian ethics were transformed over the course of the ongoing Crusades. At the beginning of this series of wars, Anna had commented with surprise that the Western armies included priests who were willing to fight and shed blood. She said the Greek Orthodox priests would never do that. As the Crusades progressed, Westerners produced orders of fighting monks—such as the Knights Templar and the Hospitallers—who formed the tip of the spear in the battle against Muslim forces.

To stop the Turkish advance that was going to threaten the great city of Byzantium itself, the new, young emperor Alexius Comnenus raised taxes to build an army and recruited soldiers from within his own lands, but he knew it wouldn't be enough. He turned to Christians in the West, who had skilled knights whom his forces had fought in Sicily. Alexius sent a request to the pope to send him some knights to fight the Turkish menace in the east.

Alexius sent his request to Pope Urban II, who took the opportunity to demonstrate the power of the church over kings. Instead of just sending some mercenaries, Urban called for a holy war against the newly strengthened Muslims, and this culminated at the Council of Clermont in November 1095, where he preached a famous sermon. Now the pope could command an army, just as a secular king might, and his prestige increased with the gathering of the forces.

In Urban's speech, he promised a war of invasion in which noble fighters could carve new lands for themselves and sweetened the deal by promising remission of sins for anyone undertaking this journey. Historians have speculated on what was the larger motivating force: land and wealth or salvation?

People responded to Urban's call with a fervor that surprised even planners of the excursions. While nobles prepared to march, the first to heed the call for holy war were large numbers of peasants. These were people who traditionally might not travel farther than about 20 miles in their lives, but now they marched off with no idea of how far they were going or what they would find. Most followed two self-appointed leaders: Peter the Hermit (who Anna called Cucupeter, or Peter of the Cowl) and Walter the Penniless.



Pope Urban II

Pope Urban told the departing soldiers to wear the sign of the cross on their breasts and encouraged them to earn the right to wear the symbol on their backs when they returned.

People claimed these soldiers were "marked by the cross"—roughly, *crusaded*—and this term caused people in the late 12th century to call these wars Crusades.

The calling of the Crusade had the unintended consequence of unleashing violence against the Jews through Germany and eastern Europe. As the Christians began to move, they attacked Jewish communities along the way, believing they were striking down local infidels on their way to the battle with Muslims.

Anna didn't know of this carnage, but she was shocked to see this undisciplined force reach the walls of Constantinople. She described with horror this first wave of barely armed rabble, referring to all the Westerners as Franks or Celts:

Those Frankish soldiers were accompanied by an unarmed host more numerous than the sand or the stars, carrying palms and crosses on their shoulders; women and children, too, came away from their countries.

They arrived at the walls of Constantinople on August 1, 1096.

This unruly crowd of marchers began to pillage the lands outside of Constantinople, looking for supplies. Emperor Alexius quickly made provision for the hoard to cross the Bosphorus on August 6. They landed on the outskirts of Nicaea, which was the headquarters of the Seljuk Sultan. They ravaged these lands while periodically confronting Turkish forces that emerged from the walled city. The forces of this People's Crusade, as it has come to be called, were destroyed—as Anna wrote, they were “miserably slaughtered.”

In 1291, the Muslims seized the last crusader outpost on the Asian mainland when the fortified city of Acre fell. This did not end the idea of crusading, and Muslims today still remember the battles with anger while some Western countries remember the enterprise as glorious.

Anna's observation of the People's Crusade led her to two main conclusions about the Westerners: She said they were "heedless of military discipline" and "the Latin race at all times is unusually greedy for wealth, and when it plans to invade a country, neither reason nor force can restrain it. They set out helter-skelter." This described many of the subsequent crusaders through the centuries.

As the rest of the crusaders arrived for this First Crusade, the Byzantines viewed them all with the same concern for their greed and military recklessness. Seeds of distrust between the two sides of Christendom were sealed here.

Anna's distrust was only enhanced when the main body of crusading knights arrived. Four crusading armies made their way across Europe. They all left in about August 1096 and reached Constantinople's city walls between November 1096 and April 1097. The four armies came from France, Flanders, Germany, and Italy.

The crusaders were joined by Byzantine forces and Peter the Hermit with what was left of his army. Their first target was Nicaea, the capital of the Turks in Anatolia. The Christian forces besieged the walled city for months; finally, in June 1097, the city surrendered to the Byzantine forces. The Byzantine generals claimed the city for Alexius and flew the Byzantine flag. They would not allow the crusaders to enter to plunder but simply allowed small groups to visit as pilgrims.

In the crusaders' minds, this completed their responsibility to Alexius; now they were free to carve lands of their own, as promised by Pope Urban. Alexius, of course, wanted more loyalty from them, and this would add to the animosity between Greeks and Latins.

The first crusaders to succeed in taking land without the help of the Byzantines was Baldwin of Boulogne, who set off on his own with his knights toward the Armenian lands around the Euphrates with their capital at Edessa. Baldwin was able to capitalize on tensions between Armenians—who prided themselves on being among the first Christians—and their Greek Orthodox ruler. With a combination of skilled diplomacy and a carefully orchestrated uprising that killed the Greek ruler, Baldwin named himself Count of Edessa. The first crusader state ruled by a Latin Christian was established in the east.



Baldwin of Boulogne

Meanwhile, the rest of the army marched south to the walled city of Antioch, which was so huge there weren't enough crusaders to surround it to make an effective blockade. The months of siege were marked with violent battles, disease, and starvation, leading to cannibalism. Finally, a secret negotiation was made with an Armenian inside the gates, who offered to let them in. Anna described the resulting siege in detail. At the end, the second crusader state was established.

The remaining crusaders continued their march to Jerusalem. By the time they arrived in June 1099, the Muslims were well aware of the army and took actions to preserve Jerusalem. The Muslim governor of the city had burned all the supplies in the region and poisoned the local wells, so the crusaders had no supplies, and hunger afflicted the army again. Furthermore, to avoid any possibility of traitors within the city, the governor expelled the Christians and then settled down for a lengthy siege.

**WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS:
36 GREAT WOMEN BEFORE 1400**

The crusaders were in no position to besiege Jerusalem. But against all odds, they were successful and broke through into the city.

The slaughter in Jerusalem was horrible. As soon as the violence subsided, the crusaders met to decide how to rule their new prize. They met in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and selected Godfrey of Bouillon to be the ruler in the city. The southernmost crusader state had been established.



Godfrey of Bouillon



Muslims from Egypt put together an army and marched quickly to attack the crusaders in Jerusalem. Remarkably, the crusaders, who were outnumbered by more than five to one, surprised the army and attacked. The Muslims retreated to the south, the annoyed Byzantines returned north, and the crusader states were firmly established.

Anna wrote her *Alexiad* 30 years after the emperor's death, when she was about 64 years old.

The crusader principalities were outposts of Western European culture in the East until 1291, when the Muslims seized the fortified city of Acre. During this time, the crusader states were surrounded by Muslim states, and Muslim armies would not be surprised again by heavily armed, reckless knights. The crusader states needed constant support from the west to keep them from being retaken—leading to eight more official Crusades as well as periodic skirmishes.

Despite fueling animosity between Eastern and Western Christians, the First Crusade turned out to be good for the Byzantine Empire. Not only did Alexius gain back lands on the Anatolian peninsula (modern Turkey), but the presence of the crusader states took the pressure off his armies to defend the east. During this respite, Byzantium entered a period of prosperity during the 12th century.

Readings

Buckler, *Anna Comnena*.

Comnena, *The Alexiad*.

Gouma-Peterson, *Anna Komnene and Her Times*.

Questions

- 1 How did Anna come to be a widely educated historian?
- 2 What was the cause of the First Crusade—from the point of view of the Western Christians and from the point of view of the Byzantines?
- 3 What were the results of the First Crusade? Consider both the immediate and the long-term consequences.
- 4 What was Anna's view of the Crusade?

ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE GOES ON CRUSADE

LECTURE 26

In 1136, the duchy of Aquitaine in southern France, which was ruled by Duke William X, prospered from its proximity to the Mediterranean and its trade. William owed his allegiance to Louis VI, king of France, but William was actually wealthier and more powerful than the king. William had two surviving legitimate children, both girls; the older one—Eleanor—was the heir to the duchy of Aquitaine.





ELEANOR AND LOUIS VII

In 1137, Duke William died, leaving 15-year-old Eleanor an orphan and under the protection of the king of France, Louis VI, called Louis the Fat. The king wasted no time in claiming the young woman; he sent his knights to take her from her home to Bordeaux, where he joined her—accompanied by his 16-year-old son, who would become Louis VII.

To secure the succession and gain Eleanor's rich lands in Aquitaine, the elder king arranged for the two teenagers to be married while in Bordeaux. A few weeks after the wedding, King Louis the Fat died of dysentery, and his son, Louis VII, became king, with Eleanor as his queen.

Eleanor became pregnant shortly after their marriage in 1138, but she had a miscarriage. Seven years later, Eleanor delivered a daughter, Marie. These should have been Eleanor's prime childbearing years; why did so much time elapse between pregnancies?

Louis, who had been raised to serve the church, was plagued by the attitudes he learned as he was trained for the church. Louis had studied the writings of the church fathers—especially Augustine, the influential 4th-century North African bishop, who argued that though sexual intercourse was a natural part of God's plan, it had to be approached cautiously, with as little lust as possible.



Eleanor and Louis married in the Cathedral of Saint-André.

Visitors today can stand at the altar where the couple wed, and some years later, an image of Eleanor was carved to stand among the rulers on the pillars outside the cathedral.

The church also put other restraints on marital intercourse that had even more direct ramifications for producing children. Churchmen created a list of days during which intercourse was prohibited: Sundays, church feast days, and throughout Lent. Intercourse was also prohibited during a woman's menstrual period and during pregnancy. While most people ignored these prohibitions, particularly pious people like Louis adhered to them.

The Second Crusade, which tried to push back the advances of Islam, was seriously hampered by Louis and Eleanor's marriage.

THE SECOND CRUSADE

In the late 1130s, a fearsome warrior named Zengi emerged from Aleppo in Syria. Even Muslim writers told of his brutality and the rigid discipline he maintained among his own troops. The commander had a brilliant sense of siege warfare and an engineering corps to implement his ideas.

In late 1144, Zengi turned his attention to Edessa, the fortified crusader city in the upper Mesopotamian valley (modern southeastern Turkey on the border of Iraq). Edessa was the eastern outpost of the crusader states that had been founded during the First Crusade 50 years earlier, and it was the most vulnerable.

Zengi besieged the city and ordered his workers to dig deep to the foundation of one of the walls. When they reached the wall, they packed the passage with flammable material and set it on fire. As the fire blazed, the weakened walls tumbled, and Zengi's men swarmed in and began to slaughter the citizens.

As the city fell, messengers rode to the west, looking for help. One went to Rome to tell Pope Eugenius III, another went to Germany to seek the aid of King Conrad III, and the last messenger went to Paris to the court of Louis and Eleanor. All listened to the plea from the east, and each answered.

Pope Eugenius responded by calling a Crusade, urging knights vigorously to defend the accomplishments of their forefathers, who had taken the land in the eastern Mediterranean. Like his predecessor Urban II, who had called the First Crusade, Eugenius promised remission of sins and salvation for those who died in the war.



Pope Eugenius

The pious Louis resolved immediately to go on Crusade, and he called his nobles to meet him in Vézelay, France. Eleanor refused to be left behind. At this hilltop town, the nobles gathered on Easter Sunday 1146 to hear a sermon preached by the most famous and most articulate churchman of the day, Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, who moved his listeners to take the cross. King Conrad III of Germany had agreed to go, and King Louis and Eleanor also took crosses.



Abbot Bernard

Christian armies began to prepare, and even churches had to melt down religious vessels to supply crusaders with the large sums of money needed to finance this venture. King Conrad left first, while Louis and Eleanor waited for the pope to come to France to see them off. On June 11, 1147, crowds gathered at Saint-Denis to wave farewell to the royal entourage, and the pope blessed them as they prepared to leave.

In Christendom, hopes were high for this Crusade led by two kings and a queen.

As lord of the extensive lands of Aquitaine, Eleanor could summon more than 300 vassals—fighting men who owed allegiance only to her—but she was not willing to turn them over to Louis. She wanted to be part of this great adventure, and she had the resources to guarantee it. In addition, she had been corresponding with her uncle Raymond, who ruled Antioch. With the fall of Edessa, Raymond's lands were vulnerable, and he wanted his niece to bring soldiers to help him.

Eleanor had plenty of reasons to go east, and she jumped at the chance. She brought with her not only 300 mounted knights, but also many of her royal ladies-in-waiting, who brought a great baggage train of clothing and supplies—which would cause problems.

We know a lot about what went on during this Crusade because there is a long account written by Odo, a monk of Saint-Denis, and there is surviving correspondence from the period.

A SERIES OF DISASTERS

People were curious about this Second Crusade because the first had generated such excitement. But for all the excitement and preparations, the Second Crusade was a series of disasters. The problem began with King Conrad, who arrived in the east before the French. The Germans camped in a floodplain just west of Constantinople, where they lost many men, horses, and equipment when a storm blew through.

Once they were across the Bosphorus into Asia Minor, the army tried to cross the mountainous lands but were attacked mercilessly from the hills and experienced a crushing defeat. Foot soldiers were slaughtered, and only the better armed knights escaped with their wounded king.

The retreating Germans encountered the French army a few days later. Louis and Eleanor were shocked by the defeat; whose side was God on anyway? The wounded Conrad withdrew to Constantinople to spend the winter recovering, and his remaining army joined the French.

The French seemed to have put their faith in God rather than military tactics. They faced the additional problem of the relationship between Eleanor and Louis: Who was in charge? The leadership of the French forces was split.

They decided to cross the Phrygian mountains in central Asia Minor to reach Eleanor's uncle Raymond in Antioch as quickly as possible. This was a bad idea. Logistically, there were probably more than 20,000 people and a large baggage train, and all had to move slowly through narrow passes.



Eleanor and her troops took the lead, and by the end of the day, they had crossed the summit of the pass and were well out of sight of the slow-moving baggage train with foot soldiers in the middle of the army. This line was stretched impossibly thin, and the Turks watching from the hills took advantage; they fired down at the center of the army with arrows and rocks.

When word of the attack came back to Louis, the king and his knights rode quickly to try to save the day, but it was too late. Louis's guards were killed, and the king barely escaped falling down a cliff by grabbing a tree root and climbing to safety. Louis and the remnants of his knights caught up with Eleanor and the vanguard, who were shocked by the disaster. Some soldiers blamed the excessive baggage that the ladies insisted on bringing, which extended the line too far.

Recognizing his own shortcomings, in an unprecedented move, Louis turned over the command of his army to the Knights Templar—those fighting monks who had demonstrated their military skill in the Holy Land for 20 years—who marched most of the army toward Antioch. The king, queen, and their nobles traveled there by sea.

DISASTER IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF RAYMOND

Louis and Eleanor were welcomed into Antioch with fanfare and celebration organized by Eleanor's uncle Raymond—a strong, vibrant warrior. Among other things, the two loved the same poetry, and they spent so much time together in close conversation that courtiers whispered about it. The king grew jealous, and animosity grew between Louis and Raymond.

In the Middle Ages, incest was about marriage and property, not about sex and genetics.

Raymond wanted the crusaders to help him secure his borders that had become vulnerable after the fall of Edessa. Eleanor agreed with her uncle and was prepared to keep her vassals in Antioch. Louis wanted to go to Jerusalem—that holy city drew this pious king.

But this argument was not only about military strategy. It seems that Eleanor was having a sexual affair with her uncle.

Medieval writers were scandalized by this affair, repeating it and embellishing it as time went on. While some historians have tried to argue that Eleanor was innocent, all the evidence suggests that she did indeed have a love affair with her uncle.

When Louis demanded that she leave Antioch—and Raymond—Eleanor ironically raised the issue of incest, saying that it was unlawful for her and Louis to remain together because they were related “in the fourth and fifth degree.” At the time, the incest bar was at a level that was almost incalculable for most people, except for genealogists. Clearly, Eleanor had found a genealogist to give her a way out of this marriage.

Louis could not simply divorce Eleanor for adultery because that would mean neither of them could remarry in the church, and Louis still needed a male heir, so divorce was not an option. Louis put off making a decision about Eleanor and instead focused on the Crusade.

Incest taboos mark the degrees of family relationship within which couples may not marry.

In 829, churchmen meeting in council in Paris issued a decree banning marriage within seven degrees of blood kinship, which means that a couple can have no relatives for seven generations past.

Eleanor wanted to stay in Antioch with Raymond and relinquish her crown, but Louis quietly mobilized his forces to leave for Jerusalem, and sometime after midnight, as everyone in the castle slept, he had Eleanor kidnapped and placed on his ship. She went to Jerusalem against her will. She was silent for the duration of the Crusade, presumably held captive until everyone was certain she was not pregnant by Raymond.

THE DISASTROUS END OF THE CRUSADE

The rest of the Crusade continued to go badly. After an ill-conceived and disastrous attempt to take Damascus, the crusaders left the Holy Land. They had spent a fortune, lost thousands of men, and accomplished nothing.

In 1149, the crusaders sailed west. That same year, Muslim armies attacked Antioch and killed the formidable Raymond.

The Crusade and their marriage in tatters, Louis and Eleanor sailed to Italy to consult with the pope. The couple argued their cases: Eleanor wanted an annulment based on violation of the incest ban; Louis wanted the marriage preserved. The pope agreed with Louis, declaring the marriage legal, and forbade anyone even to speak against it. In this precedent-setting case, the church demonstrated how flexible it could be when interpreting its laws—even when applied to incest.

Eleanor became pregnant and had a daughter in 1150. But because Eleanor had not birthed a son, the marriage got only worse. Finally, in 1152, a chronicler notes that "friends and relatives of the king came to him and said their marriage was incestuous and illegal for they were related in the fourth and fifth degrees."

Purportedly, the king was surprised, though Eleanor had been making this argument since Antioch. The king was now ready to listen. He claimed he could no longer endure “living in sin” and appealed to the archbishop of Paris. In March 1152, the nobles of France met and decreed that the marriage was annulled due to consanguinity.

Two months later, Eleanor married Henry of Normandy, who would later become Henry II of England. With this vigorous king, she produced eight children and went on to influence events in Christendom. Henry and Eleanor were even more closely related than she and Louis had been, but there was no complaint about that incest. Churchmen had indeed become flexible in these matters.

The impact on the crusading ideal and the crusader states in the East was enormous. As the emboldened Muslims continued their offensive, people in the West began to question the value of crusading—and perhaps to wonder why God had not stepped in to help in his Holy War. It took the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 for the West to marshal another Crusade, but the movement continued to decline until the fall of Acre in 1291, when the Latins were finally expelled from the Holy Land.



Henry II

Eleanor is buried in the abbey of Fontevrault in western France next to her son, Richard the Lionheart of England.

Readings

Phillips, *The Second Crusade*.

Weir, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*.

Wheeler and Parsons, eds., *Eleanor of Aquitaine*.

Questions

- 1 How satisfying was Eleanor's marriage to Louis of France? What were the problems?
- 2 What precipitated the calling of the Second Crusade?
- 3 Why did Eleanor go on Crusade? What were the results of her participation?
- 4 How did the medieval church define incest? How is this similar to or different from today's definitions?
- 5 How did Eleanor and Louis's marriage end?

MARIE OF CHAMPAGNE PROMOTES ROMANTIC LOVE

LECTURE 27

In 1153, the capital city of Troyes in Champagne was one of the wealthiest and exciting cities in France. Fifty years earlier, the count of Champagne hosted fairs at which merchants could come together to sell goods. And as is always true, when people trade goods, they trade ideas, and at these fairs, artistic enterprises flourished as well as commercial ones. In the mid-12th century, the countess Marie of Champagne served as a patron of the literary arts. This patronage created a new sensibility—romantic love, or courtly love—that would set the emotional life of the West apart from that of the rest of the world until the present day.



A NEW VIEW OF LOVE

Marie was the eldest daughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine and the French king Louis VII, and in 1153, when she was eight years old, she was engaged to be married to the 26-year-old Henri I, count of Champagne. Henri was a friend of Louis and Eleanor who had gone on the Second Crusade with them, and this was an excellent marriage for Marie, because it would join the French royal family with the wealthy county of Champagne.

Although the region of Champagne produced excellent white wine—and had done so since Roman times—the sparkling wine that has taken the name Champagne was not developed there until the 17th century.

Marie and Henri married in 1164, and she took her place as the countess of Champagne. She and Henri had four children: Henri II, Marie, Scholastique, and Theobald. She spent most of her life in the castle of Troyes, enjoying the riches generated by the fairs and subsidizing poets and singers to entertain her court. She also served as regent for Henri during his long absences, such as when he went to fight in the crusader states around Jerusalem and after his death in 1181.

Both Marie and Eleanor—who ruled and lived frequently without their husbands—advocated a new ideal of love, called courtly love, or romantic love, that placed the power of romance in the hands of women. Some scholars suggest that this idea of romantic love set the West apart from the rest of the world in its romantic sensibilities.

In this view, love is seen as having the ability to transform the lover—especially the man—into someone braver, stronger, and more noble than he was before. Therefore, to aspire to love—and to love a noblewoman—was an end in itself.

Love and marriage wouldn't come until the 16th century.

The idea of this new kind of romantic love began with the troubadour poets in Provence, southern France. Eleanor grew up hearing the poetry because her grandfather, Duke William IX, was considered the first poet of these lyrics.

William's lyrics were not of elaborate courtly love, though; they were frankly bawdy with allusions to sexual activity told with joy and fun. He was completely in charge, owing loyalty to none and expecting women to do his bidding.



After William, subsequent poets appealed to the women in charge, and their tone changed. Instead of bragging about their conquests, they needed to cultivate wealthy patrons to get support. William became the model for the language of the lyric and the idea of praising love, but the idea of love becoming an ennobling goal was new.

One example of this new poetry may be seen in the poet Cercamon:

But the power of grace is in her all

And that can lift me or make me fall. ...

For if I respect and follow her

She'll make me false or make me fine.

MARIE OF CHAMPAGNE PROMOTES ROMANTIC LOVE

Because the power was within the woman, the perfect noble lover had to do everything she commanded. Knights who pledged this kind of service hoped to be rewarded ultimately with sexual favors.

It may be that part of this romantic love tradition was a simple veil and apology for adulterous love. Men stayed gone for years during warfare, leaving their noble wives in charge of the castles. These women, like Eleanor and Marie, wanted love, attention, and sometimes sex.

This kind of romantic love caught on and spread through noble courts like wildfire. By the end of the 12th century, it was everywhere in southern France, and in the next century, it spread to northern France, Germany, and Italy.

The villains in this poetry were not adulterers but whispering courtiers who spread rumors and scandal, interfering with the secret love affairs of the courts.

Through this elaborate game of love, noblewomen gained a way to control flattering knights. Men not only gained the possibility of an adulterous affair but also found a new sensibility to guide their quests for prowess. Many men loved only from afar, fighting for women they had seen from a distance.

Marie took the ideas of romantic love and used the wealth of Champagne and her own experience to serve as patron of the romantic literary arts.

There were a few women poets who lived in Provence. We have poems from about 20 of them, and they show this romantic love tradition from a different perspective. These women want the men present and attentive, not worshipping them from afar.

THE ROMANTIC LOVE TRADITION UNDER MARIE'S PATRONAGE

The location of the court at Troyes on the crossroads of the Champagne trade fairs helped spread the troubadour poetry from the south, where it originated, into northern France. As it developed there, it changed somewhat from the poetry of the south. The northern French lyrics kept the basic courtly tradition of a suffering lover, a mighty and haughty lady, and the difficulties of love. However, these poets were more down-to-earth than the southern ones. They didn't wax metaphysical; instead, there is a realism to their poetry.

Marie made an even larger impact on the literary history of the West through her patronage of Chrétien de Troyes, who created the Arthurian romance—that is, he was the first to transform the Celtic legends of King Arthur into long romances that he used to illustrate the themes of romantic love.

One of Marie's poets, Conon de Béthune, wrote popular crusader songs, in which the lover faced the practical separation from his beloved when he went on Crusade. You can hear some of Conon's haunting melodies in YouTube videos today.



The historical Arthur was probably a 5th-century British war leader whose deeds were remembered and developed in Celtic poetry.

In 1138, the historian Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote *History of the Kings of Britain*, in which he developed the outlines of the Arthurian legend as we know it.

When Eleanor became queen of England in 1154, she read and enjoyed Geoffrey's account, and through her patronage, the tales of Arthur began to spread.

Chrétien wrote five romances between 1170 and 1190, and all of these use King Arthur's court as their starting point. The romances surround the adventures of his knights, including Lancelot, Perceval, and Yvain. All these influential works contain the elements of romantic love—the demands of the lady and the challenges and rewards of love itself.

Chrétien writes that Marie of Champagne asked him to write a romance based on the theme of adulterous love between Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, and this is perhaps the most influential part of the Arthurian legend, entering the modern era with movies, novels, and even the musical *Camelot*.

Marie's literary patronage produced one more writer whose influence on the romantic love tradition was immeasurable: André Le Chapelain, whose influential work is *Book of the Art of Loving Nobly and the Reprobation of Dishonourable Love*, more popularly known simply as *On Love* (*De amore*).

André Le Chapelain's *On Love* survives in a dozen manuscripts from the 13th through 15th centuries and was translated repeatedly in subsequent centuries.

André based his work roughly on the Roman author Ovid's *Art of Love* (*Ars amatoria*), which was written in about the year 1 BCE. Ovid's work was a lighthearted manual on seduction and love; André took its form and created a new art of love that was appropriate for the new romantic love tradition. André's work is the clearest articulation of the medieval love that had such an influence on the West.

FROM THE ROMANTIC LOVE TRADITION TO RELIGION

Marie's husband died in 1181, when she was only 36 years old. She ruled Champagne for the next 17 years, until just before her death in 1198. During the last decade or so of her life, she turned her interest and patronage from romantic love to religion.

Chrétien, after writing the Arthurian romances for Marie, left her court to seek patronage at the court of Philip, the count of Flanders, so he was no longer supported by Marie. Instead, Marie made the court of Champagne a center of translation of scripture from Latin into French. She also commissioned a poet to produce a rhymed translation of Psalm 44 and, in 1192, asked another poet to translate the Old Testament into poetry.

Marie doesn't say why she turned the attention of the court to religion in these years, but it likely had to do with wars of the crusaders in the Holy Land that deeply affected her family.

Marie's husband Henri went to Jerusalem to try to boost the armies there, but he was captured by the Muslims in 1179 and held prisoner for several years. Marie served as regent during her husband's imprisonment. Finally, the emperor of Constantinople paid Henri's ransom, and Henri returned home in 1181, only to die that year.

MARIE OF CHAMPAGNE PROMOTES ROMANTIC LOVE

In 1187, the Muslim leader Saladin successfully took the city of Jerusalem, ending the reign of Christians over that region. News of this disaster spread through Christendom, and kings in the West gathered to launch the Third Crusade, which was also a disaster that affected Marie's family.

Eleanor's son, Richard the Lionheart of England—Marie's half brother—joined the Crusade as a leader. After three years of fighting, this Crusade was ended by negotiation with Saladin rather than any military victory. On his way home, Richard was captured by the Christian Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI and held for about a year while his mother worked to raise his ransom.

Marie's elder son, Henri II, went on Crusade in 1190 to join his uncle Richard. Henri stayed on after Richard's departure, hoping to gain political advantage—and the crown of Jerusalem—but he died in an accident in Acre in 1197.

Before Henri went on Crusade, he required his nobles to swear allegiance to his younger brother Theobald, who was only 11 years old when Henri left crusading. When Henri died, Theobald was 18 and became count of Champagne.

Marie retired to a convent near Meaux to pray and died there the next year, in 1198. She was buried in the Meaux cathedral, but her tomb has been lost.



In the 15th century, Protestant reformers urged men and women to marry for love. Sadly, when marital love seemed to wane, the rate of divorce, which was allowed by Protestants, skyrocketed.

Readings

Bogin, *The Women Troubadours*.

Capellanus, *The Art of Courtly Love*.

de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*.

Markale, *Courtly Love*.

Questions

- 1 How did the location of Marie's court in Champagne increase her wealth and influence?
- 2 What is the nature of romantic love? In what ways do we still adhere to these ideals, and in what ways do we not?
- 3 How did Marie contribute to the growth of the Arthurian romance legends?
- 4 Why did Marie turn to religion instead of love at the end of her life?

HELOISE EMBRACES THE NEW PHILOSOPHY

LECTURE 28

In the early 12th century, Parisians witnessed the affair between two of the most notorious lovers: Abelard and Heloise. But this affair was not only one of the heart; their love played out against the intellectual revolution that was beginning. Scholars came to Paris to teach, and students came to hear lectures delivered by famous teachers. Many other people in Paris were excited about this surge in intellectual activity as well; one such person was the canon Fulbert, a church official who was guardian to his niece Heloise. Through Heloise's experience, we can explore the ideas and passion that created the intellectual flourishing that has come to be called the 12th-century renaissance.





HELOISE'S EDUCATION

As was typical among wealthy families, Heloise had received her early education with the nuns at the convent of Saint Marie of Argenteuil. She studied languages and was an exceptional student. When she returned to her uncle's household, they had long conversations in which she held her own in citing texts and analyzing them. She wanted more education, and he was glad to accommodate her.

In 1115, Fulbert hired 36-year-old Peter Abelard—the most brilliant, charismatic, and controversial teacher in Paris—to tutor 17-year-old Heloise. This began a love affair that scandalized the medieval world and that remains entrancing even today as the subject of novels and films.

What makes their affair so memorable is the fact that it was so well documented and public. Later in his life, Abelard wrote an autobiography called *History of My Troubles* that recounts the events from his point of view. In addition, Heloise wrote a series of letters to Abelard that includes a rare account of her feelings during the affair and for the rest of her life.

In 1115, Paris was the most intellectually exciting city in Europe.



In the standard medieval educational curriculum, students first studied the trivium: grammar, rhetoric, and logic. The modern term *grammar school* comes from this first step of the trivium, where students are to be given the language skills upon which all further knowledge is built.

ABELARD'S NEW TEACHING METHOD

Abelard found he had a great love and great talent for logic—what medieval people called dialectic—and was determined to apply it to uncover the patterns and mysteries behind all knowledge. This was the beginning of the medieval philosophy called scholasticism, through which people attempted to use reason to understand everything—even God.

Scholars suddenly discovered tools of logic so refined that they thought their minds could grasp anything. That's what Abelard felt. He wrote: "I was so carried away by my love of learning that I renounced the glory of a soldier's life," a role that came with his position as eldest son. He gave his inheritance to his younger brother and began his career as a wandering philosopher/teacher.

Abelard introduced a new teaching method that made him wildly popular with students. He called it disputing, in which he posed a problem and discussed it from all sides with his students. This Socratic method of questioning and answering replaced dry lectures from masters. Abelard was at the cutting edge of the new logic—indeed, the bleeding edge, for his thoughts made him many enemies.

At one point, Abelard and his writings were condemned by the influential mystic Bernard of Clairvaux, who insisted that God could be reached only by faith, not by logic.

A DISASTROUS AFFAIR

Eventually, Abelard came to the notice of Canon Fulbert, who hired him to tutor the promising Heloise. That is what Fulbert thought, but Abelard writes that he had heard of Heloise, whose "gift for letters had made her renowned." Abelard said he made a plan to seduce her and used the excuse of tutoring her to achieve his goal.

Abelard began to visit the house with his books, ideas, and great charisma. Abelard writes with disdain of the naïve Fulbert, who entrusted his niece to Abelard, giving him complete control over her: "I was amazed at his simplicity ... he entrusted a tender lamb to a ravening wolf."

It didn't take long for Abelard to seduce Heloise. Enraptured in this love affair, Abelard neglected his students, and all of Paris was abuzz with rumors. After a few months, Heloise sent Abelard a note saying she was pregnant and asking for his advice.

Abelard set up a school on Mont-Sainte-Genevieve, outside the walls of Paris. This is where the University of Paris began and remains, and Abelard is often credited as the founder of this great institution.

One night when Fulbert was away, Abelard snuck Heloise out of her house and took her to his sister's home in Brittany, where she bore a boy and gave him the unusual name of Astrolabe, the navigational instrument that had been perfected by Muslims and was revolutionizing sea navigation.

When Fulbert returned to Paris, as Abelard wrote, he "went almost out of his mind with grief and mortification," but there was nothing he could do but rage. Abelard approached Fulbert, hoping for some kind of reconciliation. He took responsibility for his actions by blaming the force of love and offered a compromise: He would marry Heloise if Fulbert agreed to keep the marriage secret. This would offer no public vindication for his fallen niece, but for Fulbert, it was a start. He agreed, though there is no reason to think he would keep the secret.

There is no firm answer to the question of why Abelard wanted the marriage to be secret. Nevertheless, Abelard went to Brittany to get Heloise to return to Paris and "make his mistress his wife." Perhaps surprisingly, Heloise made the strongest argument against marriage—secret or otherwise.

Abelard devotes a great deal of space to Heloise's arguments against marriage. Heloise quotes many philosophers of the past who argued that only a solitary life would provide enough leisure and tranquility for someone to think deeply enough to uncover philosophic truths. She argued that the demands of children and family would interfere with Abelard's career as a master of dialectic and that she would be the cause of his loss of reputation and career. Abelard said she claimed "that the name of mistress instead of wife would be dearer to her and more honorable to me."

This speech by Heloise is one of the most dramatic examples of the new sensibility that valued intellectual activity over family ties and societal norms. She was willing to pay a big price so that her tutor could continue to teach and think. Intellectual commitment outside the church was new; Heloise was helping to figure it out.

Abelard would not be persuaded. He insisted on marriage and said that because she did not want to oppose him, she agreed to the marriage.

The couple left the baby in Brittany with Abelard's family and returned to Paris. They married in secret in a service attended by Fulbert and a few of their friends. Afterward, they separated and only came together in secret to make love.

Of course, the secret would get out. Fulbert and his servants began to tell people of the marriage to redeem Heloise's honor. Heloise lied to protect Abelard, saying she was unmarried, and Fulbert, in his anger, beat her. Abelard wanted to save her. He took her from Fulbert's house to the convent of Argenteuil, where she had lived as a girl, and disguised her as a nun—with the exception of the veil, indicating that she had not taken her final vows as a nun.

Fulbert and his family were furious. They believed Abelard had violated their agreement and had actually made Heloise take vows to become a nun. As Abelard wrote, "Wild with indignation, they plotted against me." One night while Abelard slept, two of Fulbert's men bribed Abelard's servant to let them in his room. They castrated Abelard and then fled into the night.

This was no secret crime in this most-public city, and some of his fans and pupils caught two of the criminals who had mutilated him, including his faithless servant, and castrated and blinded them in revenge.

Abelard wrote of the shame and humiliation he felt, which he claimed distressed him more than his castration. He could no longer look to a career in the church—to rise through the ranks of priest and bishop—because church law forbade eunuchs to serve. Instead, he sought refuge in a monastery, taking vows as a monk.

This decision came with complications for Heloise: For a married man to enter a monastery, his wife first had to agree to renounce the world and become a nun. Abelard wrote in passing that "Heloise had already agreed to take the veil in obedience to my wishes and entered a convent." As we learn in a later letter from Heloise, the decision for her was much more complex. She was only 19 years old and felt no calling for the religious life. Becoming a nun would be a huge renunciation, but she made it.



Heloise entered the convent of Argenteuil, where her skills allowed her to quickly rise to prioress, the second in charge in the convent. She kept to her vows even though she felt no call to the religious life.

Abelard entered the monastery at Saint-Denis and continued his controversial teaching, gaining enemies as well as followers by his rigorous disputation.

LATER CORRESPONDENCE

In 1131, Abelard wrote his *History of My Troubles*, detailing their love affair, his castration, and his many intellectual struggles. It achieved wide circulation, and it came to Heloise.

Reading Abelard's account stimulated Heloise to write to him, and thus began the correspondence between them that reveals their lives so long after their disastrous affair. Through this correspondence, their continuing relationship can be traced in ways that are unprecedented for ancient people.

With the opening of her first letter, Heloise reveals the ambiguity of her relationship with Abelard:

To her master, or rather her father, husband, or rather brother;
his handmaid, or rather his daughter, wife, or rather sister;
to Abelard.

In 1980, fragments of the early love letters between Abelard and Heloise were found, filling out our understanding of their love affair.

Their relationship had changed so over time—he was her brother monk, her religious father, her lover, and everything else. She wrote that she had read his biographical letter and it recalled to her everything that had gone on before. She wanted to recapture the feelings of love in correspondence.

Abelard's salutation on his return letter leaves no ambiguity as to their relationship: "To Heloise, his dearly beloved sister in Christ, Abelard her brother in Christ." He goes on to say that if she needs any "instruction and writings in matters pertaining to God, write to me what you want, so that I may answer as God permits me."

This began a new phase of their relationship. In their letters, they engaged in dialogues regarding interpretations of scriptures, church doctrine, and the proper use of hymns. These two great minds engaged in the kind of back-and-forth that they both loved.



Some commentators have argued that these epistolary dialogues with Heloise helped shape Abelard's later works of philosophy. For Heloise, philosophy sustained her when all else—love, marriage, motherhood, and even religious calling—failed.

Abelard died in 1142. Abelard's body was sent to be buried in Heloise's community. Heloise died in 1163 or 1164 and was buried next to her beloved Abelard.

The bones of Heloise and Abelard were moved several times but now rest in the Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, where people still leave flowers in remembrance of their love.

Readings

Abelard and Heloise, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*.

Burge, *Heloise and Abelard*.

Marenbon, *Philosophy of Peter Abelard*.

Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*.

Questions

- 1 What was the intellectual setting of Paris in the 12th century? What was the curriculum, and why was it exciting?
- 2 What was the early relationship between Heloise and Abelard? How would we view such a relationship today?
- 3 How did Heloise and Abelard's marriage end?
- 4 What was the nature of Heloise and Abelard's correspondence late in their lives? Do you think this was a love story? Why or why not?

HILDEGARD REVOLUTIONIZES TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

LECTURE 29

In 1136, monasteries of both men and women all over Europe had become rich and influential. Their leaders—abbots and abbesses—often corresponded with kings and nobles, influencing public policy, and crowned heads sought out their advice. In addition, monasteries were repositories of learning: For centuries, nuns and monks had copied precious manuscripts and exchanged them among themselves. By the 12th century, many monasteries had impressive libraries—some with as many as 300 to 500 books, called codices, written painstakingly by hand on animal skins called vellum or parchment and sometimes beautifully decorated.

In 1136, a 38-year-old nun named Hildegard became abbess of the monastery of Saint Disibod in the Rhineland of Germany. She had little formal education from books, because her monastic house had few codices, but in her writings, we can see an impressive integration of knowledge from theology to science and medicine, which shows how extensive the spread of knowledge was. She was also able to bring her own experiences, whether visionary or practical, to recast this old knowledge into new and fresh applications.



HILDEGARD'S RISE TO ABBESS

Hildegard was born in 1098 in Bermersheim in the Rhineland in Germany. She was the youngest of 10 children of an aristocratic family. From early childhood, Hildegard seemed to her parents to be marked by God. From the age of three, she seemed to fall into periodic illnesses during which she had visions.

As a contemporary biographer wrote, "she shuddered at the appearance of a dazzling light that filled her whole field of vision," and she described the experience by saying, "I saw so great a brightness that my soul trembled."

Hildegard is one of the most famous women from the Middle Ages, and we are fortunate to know a good deal about her because her many writings include lots of biographical details.

These experiences continued throughout her life; she lived in what she called "the shadow of the living Light," and in time, she came to understand these episodes as divine revelations. She described her visions, and her nuns illustrated them, showing flames emerging from her head. She found these events physically exhausting and suffered from bouts of debilitating illness afterward. Some historians of medicine have suggested she suffered from severe migraines, but she and her admirers saw in these headaches a message from God.

Her parents also seemed to think that Hildegard was chosen for a religious life, so when she was eight years old, her parents offered her as a monastic oblate. In the Middle Ages, it was not uncommon for parents to decide that one of their children would become a monk or nun, which meant that the child would be raised in the monastery until he or she was old enough to take final vows. Hildegard was likely placed as an oblate because of her visionary episodes.

Hildegard was placed in the care of a noblewoman, Jutta of Sponheim, who had established a hermitage near the then-male monastery of Saint Disibod. Other women soon joined them, and their community was established as a nunnery, with Jutta as abbess. It was here that Hildegard received her impressive education. When Jutta died in 1136, Hildegard became abbess, and then her reputation and accomplishments began to grow.

Ruins of the monastery of Saint Disibod can still be visited today.

In about 1148, Hildegard moved her 50 or so nuns from Saint Disibod to a new and independent foundation, the Rupertsberg, near the town of Bingen, along the Rhine. From this point on, this famous abbess has been known as Hildegard of Bingen. The monastery she founded, now called Eibingen Abbey, is still flourishing.

HILDEGARD'S ACHIEVEMENTS IN MANY FIELDS

During her life, Hildegard was most famous for recording her visions in a work called *Scivias*, which is short for *Scito vias Domini*, or *Know the Ways of the Lord*. This work relates 26 of her visions and includes commentaries on such topics as the creation of the world and the fall of humans, salvation, and the kingdom of God.



The work is accompanied by 35 illustrations that she described to her illuminator. These elegant miniatures of a swirling cosmos with angels and stunning geometric shapes are more interesting for modern viewers than the theology of the text.

Hildegard sent her visionary work to the great theologians of the day, including Pope Eugene III, who purportedly sent her a letter of blessing that in effect gave her a papal approval not only for her visions but for her authority in many things. This led to the second reason she is remembered: her many letters.

About 400 letters of hers survive—one of the largest collections of letters from the Middle Ages—and her correspondents include popes, kings, emperors, and other abbots and abbesses. Hildegard weighs in with advice on everything from problems in monastic discipline, political decisions, and infertility. These letters alone have been worth much analysis.

A third area where the Abbess brought her own creativity and striking originality was the standard religious church music. Hildegard left at least 69 musical compositions, each with original lyrics. This is one of the largest bodies of work from a medieval composer. Like her letters, these songs have been studied, played, and recorded.

Finally, Hildegard's writings include scientific and especially medical works. Hildegard wrote two scientific books that combine natural science and medicine. The first is *Physica*, or *The Book of Simple Medicine*, which details plants, animals, and minerals and tells how each is used in healing. The second is *Causae et Curae* (*Causes and Cures*), or *Book of Compound Medicine*, which deals more directly with diseases as they affect people and focuses with surprising candor on male and female sexuality.



HILDEGARD'S MEDICAL WRITINGS

Hildegard's medical writings allow us to explore a few topics: We can see the prevailing medical wisdom of the day through the medical texts she worked with, and we can see how this creative woman, who served as physician to people who came to the monastery's door for medical help, used the knowledge of healing women had always known—food and herbs. Her combination of these two sources of medical information gives us a window into medieval medicine.



Like all medieval physicians, Hildegard began with the writings of the Greco-Roman physician Galen, who flourished in the 2nd century. Galen's analysis of disease prevailed until the scientific revolution in the 17th century. Galen claimed that all disease was a result of imbalance in the body, so cures could be obtained by returning the body into balance.

In the Middle Ages, people believed they should be bled about three times a year with the changing of the seasons to stay healthy.

According to Galen and his followers, the body maintained a fine balance between bodily fluids, or humors, of which there were four: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Each of these humors had its own properties—hot or cold, wet or dry. Each humor affected the body and the mood in a particular way. The humors also corresponded to the elements they believed made up the natural world: fire, air, water, and earth. This system of the balance of humors tied medicine to physics and cosmology. Unfortunately, we've learned it's inaccurate.

Characteristics of the Four Humors

Blood is wet and hot and is the humor that brings joy and optimism. However, when someone has too much blood, they are flushed and feverish.

Phlegm is cold and wet, and an excess leads to passivity and lethargy—and to the common cold, with its characteristic runny nose.

Yellow bile is hot and dry and is made in the liver. This humor leads to high passions and anger. Excesses in this humor might lead to jaundice or cholera.

Black bile is cold and dry, and its excess can cause depression.

All ancient medicine has to do with balance, and there were really only two options to ensure that the body experienced no extremes: reduce the amount of a humor (by bleeding or purgatives that brought vomiting or bowel movements) or modify the diet to correct the imbalance with balancing foods. This kind of medicine, dealing with illness and health, was called *physic*, which is where the word *physician* originated.

There are three more medieval medical experts, and Hildegard was a skilled practitioner in all three fields.

The first are surgeons, who handled wounds, broken bones, dental extractions, and the like. Surgeons also usually performed the bloodletting that was prescribed to reduce the amount of blood in the body. Unlike today, surgeons in the Middle Ages were low-status workers. Frequently, barbers would handle a village's surgery needs, and women often worked as surgeons.



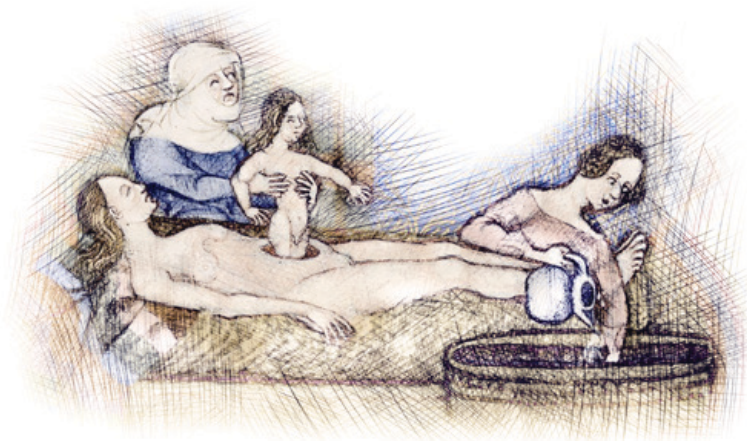
WARRIORS, QUEENS, AND INTELLECTUALS:
36 GREAT WOMEN BEFORE 1400

A second kind of skilled medical practitioner was the apothecary. A physician who wanted to balance the humors of an ill person depended on skilled apothecaries to prepare medicines and to dry and store medicinal herbs. Monastic gardens all over Europe—including Hildegard's—kept medicinal gardens, and local people depended on monastic apothecaries for their cures.



Finally, women in particular were served by midwives—women trained not only in childbirth, but also in many ailments suffered by women. Experienced women had always been available to help other women in childbirth, pregnancy, and other female issues. Hildegard advised local women who came to her seeking guidance on these issues.

Through the 12th century, midwives were informally recognized. By the 13th century, churchmen began to regulate and license midwives to be sure they knew how to baptize infants at risk of death or perform Caesarian sections.



When Hildegard turned to her scientific and medical writings, she brought several sources of knowledge to her work. She integrated Galenic medicine, with its focus on a balance of humors and heat, with herbal medicine. She applied Galen to women's issues to understand human sexuality for both genders. Finally, she applied food and cooking—traditionally women's concerns—to medical practice.

HILDEGARD'S LONG-TERM INFLUENCE

Hildegard lived to be 81 years old. Throughout her life, her reputation for wisdom grew. She even preached in churches in the cathedral towns of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne—which was unheard of for a woman.

In science and medicine, Hildegard's influence was short-lived because the basis of her science was Galen, and obviously we no longer see illness based on imbalances of four humors. Yet Hildegard was ahead of her time in recognizing the importance of balance in health and seeing food and cooking as a central component of a healthy life.

She was also ahead of her time in recognizing that women and men have different health needs; it wasn't until late in the 20th century that the medical profession found it needed to test drugs differently for men and women.

Hildegard remains popular in modern times for her mystic visions, her music, and her early recognition that women should be considered in medical matters. There are films and novels about her, and there is even a minor planet named after her: 898 Hildegard. This seems appropriate for a woman whose practical, earthy science was grounded in a heavenly vision.

Readings

Maddocks, *Hildegard of Bingen*.

McInerney, *Hildegard of Bingen*.

Schipperge, *Hildegard of Bingen*.

von Bingen, *Hildegard von Bingen's Physica*.

Questions

- 1 How did Hildegard come to be an influential abbess?
- 2 What were the principles of Galenic medicine? What were the medical practices based on this medical view?
- 3 What innovations did Hildegard make in her medical writings?
- 4 In what other fields is Hildegard remembered?

RAZIA RULES MUSLIM INDIA

LECTURE 30

In 1206, an invading Muslim army of Turks, Persians, and Afghans swept into the subcontinent of India. This dynasty established the first serious presence of Muslims in the Hindu lands of India. From the 13th century until today, the two cultures and religions have coexisted, sometimes harmoniously and sometimes clashing violently. The nature of this coexistence has shaped even the modern history of the subcontinent.



RISE OF MAMLUK SLAVES

How did the Muslims get into India in the first place? This was part of the successful expansion of nomadic Turkic people from the central Asian steppes. The same movement of Turkic peoples allowed the Ottoman Turks to threaten the Byzantine Empire in the 11th century, which led to the beginnings of the Crusades.

How did these pagan Turks come to be Muslims? Many of the conversions came through children sold into military slavery in an institution known as Mamluk slavery. While Muslims, like other ancient peoples, captured slaves to work in the fields, mines, and households, Mamluks were a different sort of slave; these slaves were raised to enter an elite force of Muslim mounted warriors.

Razia's father, Shams-al-din Iltutmish, had been a Mamluk slave to this first sultan of Delhi and was with him during his rise to power. Iltutmish was such a favorite of the sultan that the sultan's daughter Turkan Khatun was given to him in marriage.

Razia was born in 1205 and was only a year old when the Delhi sultanate was established. She was five years old when the first sultan died, and after much palace intrigue and rivalry, her father, Iltutmish, became sultan of Delhi.



Like other high-born girls and women, Razia was kept separate from men who were not family. The women lived in a private space in the house, and in the large palaces of the sultans, this space was called a harem. As in all harems, there was a hierarchy of power, and Razia's mother, as daughter of the first sultan, had a high status.

Razia had a full brother, named Nasiruddin Mahmud, and he, too, was accorded a high status. She also had two half brothers, sons of her father's slaves, but they were raised further from the centers of power.

Razia was a favorite of her father, and therefore, from the time he became sultan, the child was allowed to be with him while he made his decisions in ruling the state. As she grew older, he taught her and her brother how to administer the kingdom. Iltutmish expected his son Mahmud to rule, but Razia was trained to handle affairs of state in case of the sultan's absence. She even learned the art of mounted warfare.

However, Iltutmish's plans had to be changed. His son Mahmud died suddenly in 1229, and Iltutmish did not have a reliable successor. He believed his other sons—Razia's half brothers—were unworthy or incompetent or both. He had faith in Razia.

In 1230, when Iltutmish had to leave with his army for some battles, he chose the 25-year-old Razia to be regent in his absence. When he returned a year later, he discovered she had ruled so competently that he decided to violate all precedent: He named Razia as his heir and successor. He became the first sultan in Islam to do so. He continued to train her for the succession for the next five years, until his death in 1236. At this time, Razia was named sultan—the only female ruler to rule the Delhi sultanate.

The succession did not go smoothly. The Muslim nobles were not prepared for a woman sultan, and her half brother ascended the throne instead of her. The young man decided that the role of sultan gave him license to drink, eat, and indulge in every whim while his mother served as regent.

This situation lasted only six months before both the young man and his mother were assassinated. The nobility reluctantly agreed to allow Razia to rule as the sultana of Delhi.

Upon taking the throne, Razia gave up her women's veils and wore men's clothing. This was also necessary because she actively engaged in military matters, taking the field on horseback during warfare. Not surprisingly, many conservative Muslim men objected to her behavior.

To solidify her position, Razia ordered coins bearing her name to be minted. Some of these coins survive, and as is appropriate in a Muslim land, there is no image on them. Instead, they include a bold statement of her rule: "Pillar of women, Queen of the times, Sultana Razia, daughter of Shamsuddin Altumish."

RECONCILING ISLAM AND HINDUISM

Ruling the sultanate of Delhi was a formidable job not only because of the restless Muslim nobility but also because the rule of the Muslims was imposed on the populous and ancient civilization of the Hindus.

There can't be two cultures more different and more difficult to reconcile than Islam and Hinduism. The difficulties begin at the heart of the two religions: Islam is relentlessly monotheistic, and Hinduism is proudly polytheistic.

In addition to their temples being a source of difficulty between the two cultures, almost every meal was a source of insult. Hindus held that cows were sacred; therefore, most Hindus don't eat beef, favoring pork as their main meat. Muslims, on the other hand, believe pork is unclean and forbidden, so they eat beef as their favored meat.



With these examples of differences at the heart of the two religions, it is amazing that the Delhi sultanate was able to reconcile the two peoples at all. At first, this was not so.

The first ruler, Qutb al-Din Aibak, was not so accommodating. When he took Delhi, he planned to build a “tower of victory” to celebrate his conquest. For the land, he tore down 27 Hindu temples and used some of the columns in the new mosque and Muslim complex—called the Qutb Minar. Adjacent to the minar is the Quwat-ul-Islam (“Might of Islam”) mosque, and the whole complex is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. The mosque and minar were completed and expanded by Razia’s father.

The rulers of the sultanate did not stay in Delhi; they expanded to establish a major capital in Lahore, which is today in Pakistan. Lahore was northwest of Delhi, guarding the mountain passes and critical entrance into the Indus valley.



Qutb al-Din Aibak, the first sultan of Delhi, had been a Mamluk slave who successfully established a dynasty—called the Mamluk (“Slave”) dynasty—in 1206.

At 239 feet high, the Qutb Minar is the tallest brick minaret in the world. As if to reinforce and legitimize their rule, the inscription on the minaret proclaims: “To cast the long shadow of god over the conquered city of the Hindus.”

Sultan Aibak, Razia's grandfather, conquered the great fort of Lahore that had guarded the mountain passes for centuries and established his rule over the city. Under the sultanate, Lahore became a center of Muslim culture as poets, artisans, and artists came from Persia and Afghanistan to work for the prosperous sultans.

The Muslim kingdom in the north brought many other changes into India. Connecting India with the Muslim lands to the north brought about an increase in the movement of peoples and goods into the subcontinent, which also facilitated and stimulated trade.

Over time, trade and innovations such as carpet weaving and paper and zinc production brought a good deal of prosperity to the sultanate. But this didn't solve the problem of reconciling the two religions. At some point early on, the Muslim rulers decided that coexistence with local Hindus was a better policy than the unrealistic notion of replacing all the Hindu temples with mosques. What mechanism within Islam allowed for such compromise?

In other conquered regions, Muslim leaders permitted "peoples of the book"—Christians and Jews—to practice their monotheistic religions that had preceded the visions of Muhammad. But polytheistic pagans in North Africa and throughout the Middle East were forced to submit and convert.



This policy was impractical in a land where the invaders were dramatically outnumbered by the resident polytheistic population. Instead, the ruling Muslims wisely decided to treat the Hindus as “peoples of the book,” ignoring their polytheism and the fact that their sacred scriptures had nothing to do with the Judeo-Christian background of other accepted people.

Either Razia or her father first implemented this accommodation. Either way, Razia successfully began the process of integration that would last centuries, until new invading Muslims—the Mughal dynasty—changed the policy, criticizing the Delhi sultanate for being too lenient with the Hindus.

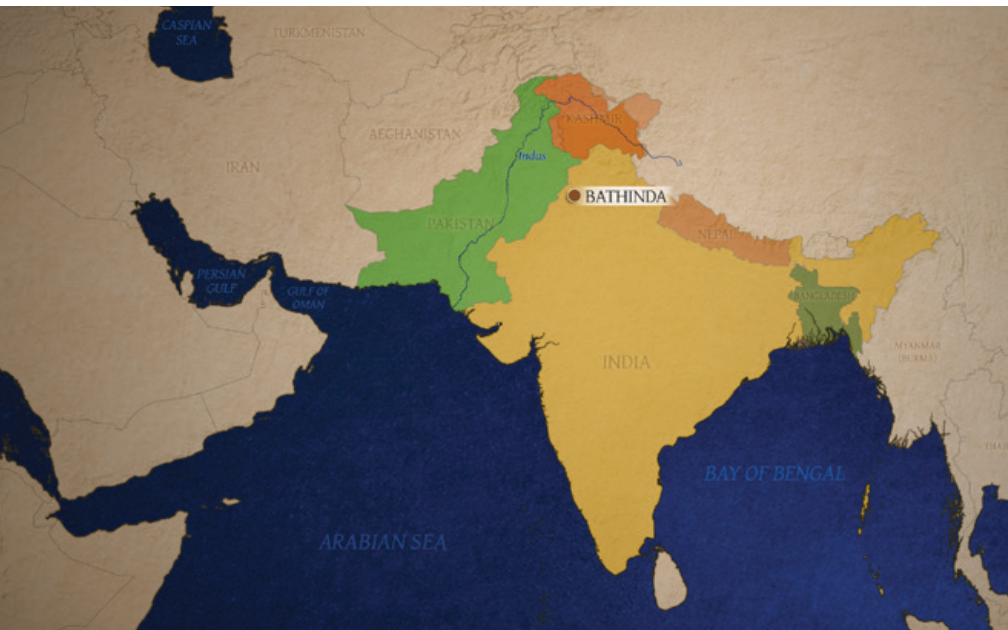
During the rule of the sultanate, some Hindus converted to Islam. Some converts sought to escape the stigma of low social class within the Hindu caste system, but most converts came through the efforts of a mystical branch of Islam that from the 19th century has been called Sufism—which was popular because it seemed to offer a blend of Hindu and Islamic mysticism.

RESULTS OF RAZIA'S RULE

Razia's warrior Mamluk father had taught her warfare, and in her men's clothing, she took the field with her armies. We have accounts of her battles attacking the famous Gwalior fort and other fortified regions.

But it didn't matter how effective Razia was as a warrior and ruler; many of the Turkish nobles could not accept the idea of a woman as sultan. She had only ruled for about four years before the nobles began to conspire to replace her.

As so often happened with women in power, rumors of sexual liaisons arose. Courtiers began to murmur that Razia was showing too much favoritism toward an Abyssinian slave (that is, a slave from modern Ethiopia). Some said they were lovers, and the court was scandalized.



Word of the love affair spread to the governor of the province of Bathinda, Malik Altunia, who decided to lead a rebellion to topple Razia. The two armies took to the field, and Razia was defeated. Her Abyssinian slave who rode with her was killed, and she was taken captive by Malik.

Malik imprisoned Razia in his palace fortress of Qila Mubarak in Bathinda, but the imprisonment was more than comfortable. She was treated like royalty, and soon the two decided to marry. The couple then combined their troops to retake the throne. (Her surviving half brother, Bahram, had replaced her.) The forces met in October 1240, and Razia and Malik were defeated near Delhi.

The couple survived and fled into the foothills, where they encountered a threat from an unanticipated source—pastoral Jat people—who captured, robbed, and killed them. No one is sure where Razia is buried.

Razia is remembered fondly, in part because she was the only official female ruler of Muslim India and probably in part because her rule was brief. It may be that her policy of accommodating Hindu religion and culture set a precedent that allowed the Delhi sultanate to thrive until it was conquered in the 16th century by the Mughal Muslims.

A contemporary historian described Razia as "sagacious, just, beneficent, the patron of the learned, a dispenser of justice, the cherisher of her subjects, and of warlike talent, and endowed with all the admirable attributes and qualifications necessary for a king."

Readings

Eraly, *The Age of Wrath*.

Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate*.

Siddiqui, *Composite Culture under the Sultanate of Delhi*.

Questions

- 1 How did Razia come to rule the Delhi sultanate—the Muslim kingdom of India?
- 2 Why was it so difficult for Muslims and Hindus to coexist? How did the Delhi sultanate accomplish their coexistence?
- 3 What were the economic benefits of the sultanate to India?
- 4 What was the long-term effect of the sultanate in modern times?

SORKHAKHTANI ADMINISTERS A MONGOL EMPIRE

LECTURE 31

In 1203, the Mongol leader Genghis Khan sought an alliance with the powerful Kereyid tribe who bordered his growing lands. The Kereyids were Christian, but that was no hindrance to making a marriage alliance with the Mongols, who were becoming increasingly powerful. The king of the Kereyids agreed to give Genghis Khan two of his daughters: Genghis married the elder of the daughters and gave the 13-year-old Sorkhakhtani to his youngest son, Tolui. Genghis could not have imagined how competent and influential this young daughter-in-law would become.



THE RISE OF THE POWERFUL MONGOL EMPIRE

Genghis Khan rose to power by breaking apart the old Mongol clans who had fought with each other in the long tradition of nomadic tribes of central Asia. He rearranged their loyalties to extend only to the Mongol state under his rule. In the following 20 years, Genghis and his Mongol army ruled the largest contiguous empire in history.

The Mongol warriors were certainly fierce, but the real secret to their success was Genghis's charisma and ability to organize the conquered lands. In large part, Genghis's success came from his reliance on the women of his family—daughters and daughters-in-law.



Genghis Khan

Genghis had four main wives, and each wife brought an alliance with a neighboring territory. As Genghis began to organize his conquests, he entrusted the administration of the regions to his daughters and sons, and the sons trusted their wives to administer their holdings. The chroniclers recorded speeches Genghis made at the marriages of his daughters, and these words reveal that he imagined an equality between husband and wife.

When Genghis delegated lands to be managed by the married couples, he gave Tolui, his youngest son, eastern Mongolia. Lucky for Tolui, his wife Sorkhakhtani was a more-than-competent partner. Tolui spent much of his time drinking and riding, and he left the work of governing to Sorkhakhtani.

THE SILK ROAD

The Mongolian steppe didn't offer much in the way of resources, but it lay just off the most important trading route in the world: the Silk Road, which was just south of the 500 miles of the Gobi desert. The Silk Road included a network of trade that connected China, India, the Mediterranean, and the Muslim countries of central Asia in between.



Genghis made some stunning victories along the Silk Road, but his real success in controlling the whole region was to require the rulers of those regions to marry his daughters. But this wasn't a traditional marriage where women were simply added to a harem of women. Instead, Genghis required the ruler to divorce all previous wives and to make the Mongol wife his coruler.

As Genghis told one of his daughters who married a ruler along the Silk Road, "When I am going on an expedition, you should be my helper, when I am galloping, you should be my steed!" And it worked. These loyal and talented daughters secured the lands along the Silk Road, and that was essential for Genghis to ensure the loyalty of his subjects, who began to long for goods to buy.

Once Genghis had united the tribes, he kept them loyal by bringing new riches into the nation, and these riches came along the Silk Road. Here, they could get camel wool blankets and soft silk, iron for knives, and flint for fire. Now there was reason to expand the conquests, and Genghis did, securing the Silk Road and creating a single trade block.

OVERCOMING ILLITERACY AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

There were two main impediments that the Mongols—and particularly the Mongol women administrators—had to overcome as they ruled over their new lands: the illiteracy of the Mongols and the diversity in religion throughout the conquered lands.

Like other nomad tribes, the Mongols were illiterate; they held their history and traditions in their memories rather than in texts. But once Genghis began to expand his empire, he recognized the importance of written laws and traditions. He turned to other literate peoples—Muslims, Persians, Christians, and Chinese—to record his edicts.

Genghis Khan's new emphasis on written records caused one of his followers to record a biography of the great man and a history of the Mongols from Genghis Khan through the reign of his son Ogodei. This remarkable work is called *The Secret History of the Mongols*.

However, sometime late in the 13th century, a scribe cut out and destroyed a section of the history to hide the women who were so important to his reign.

Genghis specifically recruited a Tatar of the Uighur tribe of Muslims who lived in central Asia. Genghis dictated his laws, which were written in Uighur script on paper (invented in China). These laws, which became known as the *Yasa*, were strikingly new in several respects, especially for women.

Genghis decreed that women could not be traded for animals or property, nor should they be raped or treated as spoils of war. These laws helping women fell by the wayside immediately once Genghis died, but they reflected his thinking about women, and his treatment of his wives and daughters reflected his ideas.

Modern historian Jack Weatherford has offered a compelling thesis that Thomas Jefferson and the founders of the Constitution of the United States may have been influenced by the laws of Genghis Khan—particularly his views on religion.

Sorkhakhtani turned to the problem of illiteracy within her own home with dramatic results. She had four sons: Mongke, Hulagu, Arik Boke, and Kublai. She raised them to rule, and to prepare them, she made sure all could read and write. Furthermore, she chose different languages and scripts for them to learn so that they could rule the multiethnic empire that was growing.

The vast, multiethnic region included Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Taoists, and the Mongols themselves, who believed in the spirits that inhabited the mountains, waters, and earth. This was not an age of religious tolerance, but the Mongols were stunningly successful in avoiding religious battles.

While Genghis Khan remained true to his Mongol animist religion, his wives and daughters-in-law were not. Sorkhakhtani was Christian, as was her whole tribe of the Kereyids, who had been converted to Christianity 200 years earlier by a missionary from the Persian church.

Sorkhakhtani was supportive of all religions in her lands. She gave alms to Muslims as well as Christians, and she built a Muslim school (a madrassa) in the city of Bukhara, in today's Uzbekistan. This important city on the Silk Road had been destroyed by Genghis Khan during his conquest, so Sorkhakhtani's generous support helped keep this city and many others in the khan's rule.

Sorkhakhtani remained a Christian throughout her life. Though her sons were raised to respect Christianity, they never were baptized or officially accepted the faith. This respect allowed them to transfer similar respect for other faiths.

All this religious tolerance came from the genius of Genghis Khan. His law on the subject was straightforward. He decreed that it was unlawful “to disturb or molest any person on account of religion.” Instead, he required his people to place the nation above the gods; he had them make sacrifices to the “spirit of the state.”

With this compromise, people who had been conquered by Genghis could enjoy a freedom of religion almost unheard of in the ancient world. In exchange, they enjoyed the peace and prosperity that came with the largest empire the world had ever known.

Sorkhakhtani followed the great khan’s policy. She encouraged her sons to place effective rule over any dogmatic religious views. Eventually, three of her sons became Muslim, as they ruled over predominately Muslim lands; her other son, Kublai Khan, favored Buddhism, as he ruled over China. She, like many Mongols, was spiritual at heart but acknowledged that there were many paths to God, and in this world, political practicalities reigned.

SORKHAKHTANI’S SURVIVAL

Genghis Khan died in 1227. On his deathbed, he urged his children to remain united to save the massive empire. His sons and daughters held the lands he had entrusted them with.

Genghis Khan was buried somewhere in the mountains of his birth, and his tomb has not been found. In China, he is remembered at a huge mausoleum, though his body does not rest there.

The khan's sons were not of the stature of the father. Ogodei, Genghis's third son, was acclaimed the great khan. Ogodei did not share his father's respect for women, and Persian chroniclers recorded horrible atrocities committed under Ogodei's reign. He slowly took away the powers left to his sisters, and as each of Genghis Khan's wives died, her territory was grabbed by one of the sons.

In 1232, Sorkhakhtani's husband, Tolui, died, and Ogodei immediately tried to join their two lands together by marrying Sorkhakhtani. She refused. He then suggested that she marry his son Guyuk, but again she refused, claiming that she wanted to devote all her efforts to raising her four sons.

In this age of violence and competition among Genghis's heirs, it was remarkable that Sorkhakhtani was able to keep them alive and out of the turmoil unleashed by Ogodei. All the contemporary accounts say that she did so by making them all obey the law of Genghis Khan and the rule of the mercurial Ogodei. She patiently taught her sons to wait for the time for them to step forward.

Sorkhakhtani carefully raised her sons and skillfully prepared them to rule. But first they would all have to survive the rule of Genghis's murderous son. She did this by supporting rather than confronting Ogodei directly.

The sources claim that Ogodei repeatedly consulted with Sorkhakhtani in everything from the administration of the empire to the dispersal of the army. In this way, she kept her family and lands safe as her sons grew under her wise tutelage.

Ogodei died in 1241, and his wife served as regent until 1246, when she arranged for her son Guyuk to be elected as the great khan. Guyuk wanted to remove the power of all the remaining Mongol women, but by now, Sorkhakhtani was ready to put her sons forward.

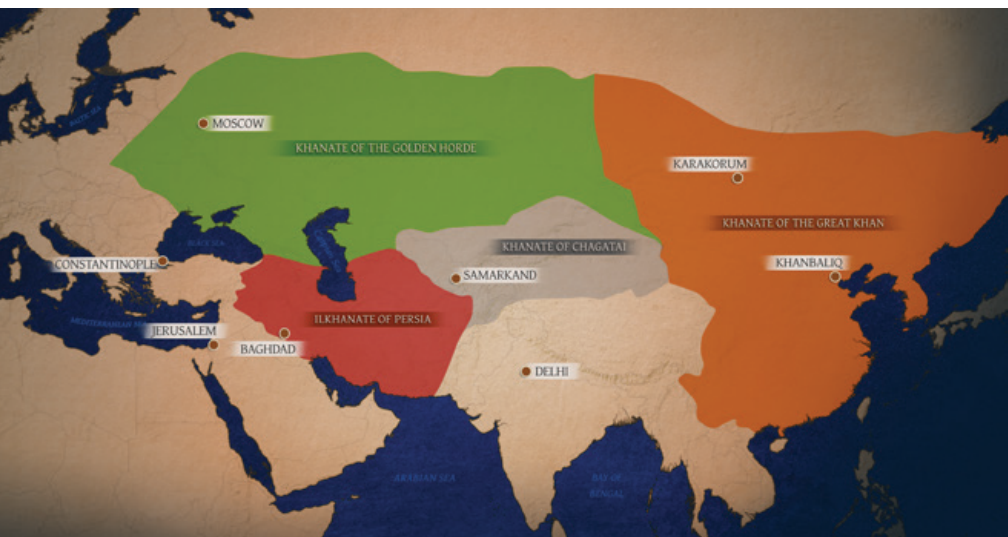
SORKHAKHTANI ADMINISTERS A MONGOL EMPIRE

In 1248, when Guyuk was getting ready to go on campaign, he died under suspicious circumstances, and historians have seen Sorkhakhtani's hand in this fortuitous death.

Sorkhakhtani immediately arranged for her eldest son, Mongke, to become the great khan. Her organization of this election showed her political skill as well as her personal charisma. She arranged for the important women of the Mongol nation to attend. This would be the last election in which the women were invited to gather to vote.

Genghis Khan's sons' slow efforts to eliminate the authority of the women of the family were bearing fruit, but Sorkhakhtani was able to fend off these efforts long enough to secure the rule of her son.

Her son Hulagu founded the Muslim Ilkhanate dynasty in today's Iran, Turkey, Georgia, and Armenia. Hulagu greatly expanded the Mongol lands, conquering Baghdad and into Syria. Hulagu laid the foundations for the Iranian state and the distinctive culture of that region.



Kublai conquered the remains of China and became the first emperor of the Yuan dynasty. Like Genghis Khan, Kublai surrounded himself with foreign bureaucrats to help him rule and, listening to his mother, leaned heavily on his Christian wife Chabi for advice.

Sorkhakhtani's youngest son, Arik, fought Kublai for control of China and was eventually defeated in 1264. But fortunately, Sorkhakhtani did not live to see her sons fight.

Sorkhakhtani died from illness in 1252. She was probably buried in a Christian church in Gansu, China, a province along the Silk Road. There, for centuries, people gave sacrifices to her memory in ceremonies that combined Christian and Buddhist rituals, which was perfectly appropriate for an empress who was so tolerant of all religions.

The legacy of the Mongols and the laws of Genghis Khan extend far beyond their empire, which slowly crumbled in the 14th century.

Readings

Morgan, *The Mongols*.

Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the Quest for God*.

——, *The Secret History of the Mongol Queens*.

Questions

- 1 How did the nomadic life of the Mongols favor the rule of women?
- 2 How did Sorkhakhtani come to power?
- 3 What was the role of religion in the Mongol empire? How did this facilitate the success of the empire?
- 4 Where did Sorkhakhtani's sons come to rule?
- 5 What was the main legacy of Sorkhakhtani and the Mongol empire?

LICORICIA DEALS WITH THE KING OF ENGLAND

LECTURE 32

In about 1220, the Jews of Winchester, England, gathered together to celebrate the marriage of Abraham and Licoricia, which was arranged to join two wealthy Jewish families in hopes of bringing children and more prosperity into the small community. Between them, Abraham and Licoricia had the capital to help them grow rich and to make them influential in Winchester and England as a whole. Licoricia and Abraham had three sons and one daughter, but then Abraham died. The widow Licoricia conducted her own business so successfully that she became one of the richest and most important people in England, and her life was intimately connected with the business and violence that swept through England and its Jewish community during the 13th century.



HOW THE JEWS FIT INTO THE NEW ECONOMY

Through the early Middle Ages, wealth was land—manors that produced food and rents for lords, kings, and armies. Through the 12th century, more money came into circulation and was used to spur long- and short-distance trade, but there were no banking, bookkeeping, and lending systems to foster the increased growth. Even kings kept their national treasury in boxes stored in their castle.

King John demanded 4,000 marks, or about 2,600 pounds of silver, for the right of the Jewish community to do business in England.

Christians were forbidden to charge interest, as usury was considered a sin. That left Jews to lend money, because they had no religious prohibition on charging interest. Furthermore, kings in England and other Western countries forbade Jews from owning land, though they could hold it as collateral for up to a year, so Jews could not hold their wealth in land. They held it in cash, which they could lend.

In the 13th century, King Henry III of England continued to look to the Jews for sources of cash. Henry III had an additional money problem: His father, John, had tried all sorts of schemes to squeeze extra cash from his nobles. In doing so, he offended most of them, and they rebelled, eventually forcing him in 1215 to sign the Magna Carta, which says the king is not above the law and can't just tax his people without their consent. But the Magna Carta did not apply to the Jews, and this led to a special relationship between Henry III and the Jews of his kingdom, including Licoricia.



Henry III

According to the charter of the Jews issued in 1201, the English king gave protection and support to his Jewish subjects. In exchange, the Jews owed him special fees or taxes—which could change at a moment's notice when the king needed more money. The king also took an estate tax, about one-third of a deceased Jew's wealth at his or her death. Kings increasingly depended on their Jewish subjects to fill their treasury with hard currency.

In exchange for these fees, the king gave the Jews protection against violence on the part of his Christian subjects. But that protection came at a price: The Jews had to feed the increasingly insatiable fiscal appetite of the king.

In 1200, there were about 5,000 Jews in England, amidst a population of about 5 million. Of these, only about one percent were involved in the lucrative business of moneylending, and Licoricia and her family were prominent among these.

MONEYLENDING AND DEBT

When Licoricia and Abraham married, they had to pay a fee to the king for the privilege, but the combination of these two wealthy households gave them plenty of capital to increase their holdings. These families were engaged in moneylending.

Jews charged between one and two percent interest per week on a loan. This was compounded, so the borrower would quickly be deep in debt. If debtors refused to pay, Jews could take them to court, and if they produced the appropriate records of the debt, the courts would respect it.

The Italian Lombard bankers who were the first Christians to engage in loans charged up to 50 percent interest.

But the resolution of the debts rarely lay between just the debtor and the lender. Jews were not allowed to buy land or hold it for more than a year and a day. Therefore, if land was the collateral for a debt, Jews had to sell it to a Christian. There are many examples of Christians making a huge profit from debts originally held by Jews. The king, too, profited, taking his own share of the money.

Throughout this course, there have been countless women who were influential because of their families or their skills. In the 13th century, times had changed enough that a woman could make an impact on her society only because of her money—a very modern concept.

Those debtors who felt cheated took their ire out on the Jews who initially made the loan, not on those who eventually profited the most, and this anger repeatedly touched the Jewish community, even in Winchester, which was considered a particularly hospitable place for Jews.

THE WIDOW LICORICIA

We are not sure how Licoricia's husband Abraham died, but he was dead by 1234, and Licoricia came into her own as a wealthy widow doing business for herself.

Licoricia had been a widow for about 8 years when she received a proposal to marry. It was very common for wealthy widows to remarry, and these alliances were often made for practical reasons to join companies of Jews together.

In early 1242, Licoricia was approached by David of Oxford, who was among the six wealthiest Jews in England. He was a great match for Licoricia, except for one problem: David was already married to a woman named Muriel.

Divorce was almost unheard of in the Jewish (and Christian) community. Only the rabbinical court could grant a divorce, and the grounds were very limited. The court ruled that David could not remarry in the case of a divorce. But the English king intervened on behalf of Licoricia and David.

Thanks to the king, David and Licoricia married and moved to Oxford, where David's business interests were centered. She soon gave David a son named Asser. Now Licoricia had five children.

But her fortunes turned again. David died in 1244, only two years after the wedding, leaving her with the infant son, David's vast business network, and the need to negotiate with King Henry.

Again a widow, Licoricia moved back to Winchester, where she took up residence. At this point, she was probably about 38 years old, and for the next 28 years, she served as one of the most influential people in the kingdom because of her close relationship with King Henry.

LICORICIA'S CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH KING HENRY

Whenever the king was in Winchester, Licoricia was a frequent visitor, and she handled much of the king's business. Not surprisingly, the Jewish community treated Licoricia as its representative and repeatedly approached her when they needed favors from the king.

Not only did Benedict make his own fortune lending money and collecting debts, but he also was elected as a guildsman in Winchester. He was the only Jew in England—and perhaps in all of Europe—to be elected to a guild, and this position gave him political power as well as citizenship. Being an official citizen of Winchester allowed Benedict to own property in his own right.

During these years, Licoricia's sons grew up and prospered. Her eldest son, Isaac, remained close to his mother's business; he represented her in court sometimes and helped collect her debts. Her second son, Benedict, was the most successful Jew in the nation. Benedict's status and Licoricia's influence marked a high point of their fortunes and showed their skill of working with the king.

While Licoricia's fortunes rose, there were problems in the land, and King Henry was under increasing pressure. Barons were opposed to the fiscal pressures that the king—and the Jews—were exerting. Periodic violence against Jews broke out in various towns, including Winchester, and the king's repeated assurance of protection didn't help as records were burned and people were killed.

Finally, the tensions rose enough that a full-scale civil war broke out. This is the Second Barons' War, led by the nobleman Simon de Montfort. His program called for a cancelation of all Jewish debts and a reassertion of the Magna Carta, which insisted that the king could not exert arbitrary power. This war raged from about 1264 to 1267, when a compromise was reached.

Thousands of Jews were killed and thousands of records were destroyed in the Second Barons' War. The Jewish community in England was reduced from about 5,000 to 2,000, and their wealth was also reduced.



Surprisingly, high-placed Jews like Licoricia and her son Benedict continued to prosper. In large part, their survival was due to their service to the king and his queen. This relationship between England's Jews and the king and queen was essentially a mutually advantageous one, but it was a personal relationship. There was little institutionalized, and special fees and taxes could be levied against the Jews at any time, and the moneylenders would then exert pressure on the English borrowers.

This state of affairs collapsed when King Henry III died in 1272. His son Edward was now king, and he would dramatically change the relationship between the crown and England's Jews.

KING EDWARD'S RESTRICTIVE LAWS

Edward had been a crusader, and the religious motivations that had sent him on Crusade led him to be unsympathetic to the plight of the English Jews. In addition, when he fought in the Second Barons' War on behalf of his father, he saw the damage that rampant moneylending was doing to the country and the anger it had inspired.

Edward became king on his father's death in 1272, but it was two years before he finished his crusading and arrived back in England. He came back determined to restrain the Jewish moneylenders in England.

Once Edward was back in England, Licoricia almost disappears from the records. She lived a quiet life in her large house in Winchester and no longer attended the king's court. Her sons continued to prosper, but never with the freedom they had experienced before. And things quickly got worse for the Jews under Edward's reign.

Almost as soon as the king returned to England, he summoned Parliament, where the Statute of the Jewry was presented. The new laws severely restricted the moneylending and imposed social restrictions. Furthermore, Edward added a new poll tax on all Jews in addition to the annual tax on the community as a whole.

Through the 1270s and 1280s, more and more Jews were imprisoned all over England for such charges as nonpayment of the king's taxes to moneylending. It is estimated that 680 Jews were imprisoned in the Tower of London alone, and other prisons were equally crowded. The Jewish community in England had fallen on hard times, and many Jews left for the continent.

Prisons were a place to extort more money from the captives, who had to pay extra to have their chains removed or to receive food.

Meanwhile, in Winchester, the violence reached Licoricia's house. One day in the spring of 1277, a woman discovered the bleeding bodies of Licoricia and her maid on the floor of the house. Both were dead from stab wounds.

Licoricia's sons pushed for an inquest into the murders. The authorities decided that the guilty man was a poor saddlemaker named Ralph, who had fled the area. He was found guilty but was never caught. Finding Ralph guilty of theft and murder made it easier to avoid calling the murder part of an anti-Jewish sentiment. However, another Jewish woman was also found murdered in Winchester that same year.

Violence continued to sweep through the Jewish community in England. Finally, in 1290, Edward expelled all the Jews from England. They took whatever money and valuables they could carry but left behind the many debts that were owed them. Their wealth had helped fund the building and growth of England in the 13th century.

Readings

Abrahams, *Expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290*.

Bartlet, *Licoricia of Winchester*.

Kushner, *Anglo-Jewry since 1066*.

Questions

- 1 How did Licoricia become so wealthy? How did her money help make her influential?
- 2 What was the relationship between the English king and the English Jews?
- 3 Why did Jews specialize in lending money?
- 4 Why were the Jews expelled from England? What were some results of that expulsion?

ABUTSU FOLLOWS THE WAY OF POETRY

LECTURE 33

In about 1232, a teenaged girl was brought to the imperial court in Kyoto by her guardian to serve the princess Ankamon. We don't know the girl's birth name, but in her later years, this talented woman became called Abutsu. It is under this name that she became known for her many writings, which continue to be influential today both in Japan and in translation throughout the world. Abutsu clung to the ancient value of poetry that combined truth and beauty in carefully chosen syllables; this dedication was called the Way of Poetry, and it shaped Abutsu's path in life.



CONFUCIANISM AND BUDDHISM IN JAPAN

When young Abutsu came to court in Kyoto, she dressed in the beautifully embroidered silk kimonos that had graced the court for centuries. Women still took pride in their long, lustrous, silky black hair, and courtiers still engaged in poetry contests and worked on their careful calligraphy. Geishas still entertained visitors, showing off skills that were demanded at court—wit, musical ability, beauty, and grace. Abutsu came to court as an expert in all these skills.

Even though there was much that had continued from the Heian period, when Kyoto was at its height, new developments had begun to transform Japan.

Beginning in 1185, the emperors at Kyoto had lost just about all their real power, and the military leaders—the shoguns—of the provinces were the de facto rulers. This period of ascendancy of the shogunate from 1185 to 1333 is called the Kamakura period because the real center of power had moved from Kyoto to Kamakura in the east of the island of Honshu, near modern Tokyo.



Confucianism had spread from China, and during the Kamakura period, Confucian ideas of hierarchy changed the situation of women, and not for the better.

In traditional Japan, women often lived in their maternal home even after they were married and retained control over their finances. If their love affairs produced children, they were raised in the maternal home. However, now, women moved to the homes of their husbands when they married and had to turn over all their resources to him. This represented a real loss of economic power, and with it came a reduction in personal power for women and political power for a woman's family.

Buddhism was also being transformed in the late 12th and early 13th centuries as religious reform movements took hold in Japan. The invigoration of Buddhism and Buddhist monasteries in Japan gave a good deal of help to women, who used to be able to count on their maternal families in times of need but who, with the new import of Confucianism, needed a new space to get help.

Women could become Buddhist nuns. Unlike Christian nuns, Buddhist nuns were not cloistered in convents. Instead, by shaving their long hair and donning a simple robe, hood, and vestment, they took themselves out of the sexual economy of wives or mistresses. By doing so, they gained a good deal of freedom.



Buddhism began in India in about the 6th century BCE when a prince named Gautama sought to alleviate the suffering he saw all around him. His solution was for people to detach themselves from the desires of this world and thus escape the cycle of rebirth that lay at the core of Hinduism. After he began teaching this insight, he became known as the Buddha, or the Enlightened one.

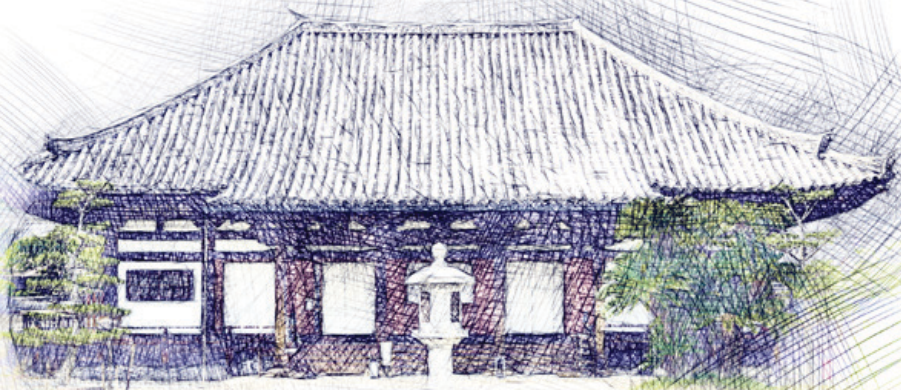
THE COURT OF KYOTO

Abutsu's first patron at court, Princess Ankamon, had taken vows as a nun when she was only 27 years old, and she lived her life in the luxury of the court in Kyoto, devoting her time to study and leisure.

When Abutsu came to court to work for the princess, she applied her calligraphy skills to copying Buddhist texts and engaged her poetic skills in witty court games. She had memorized Lady Murasaki's *Tale of Genji*—which had been the most popular book at the court for 200 years—and recited it for the court ladies.

Unfortunately, she was entranced by the romance in *Genji*, which came from a time when women controlled their own sexual lives and could experiment with impunity. But those days were gone, and Abutsu was judged harshly when she became pregnant. We do not know the father of her child.

She left the court and retired to a nunnery in Hokkeji, near Nara. Hokkeji was a Buddhist temple and convent that had been built in 745 by Empress Komyo, and in the 12th century it was expanded as Buddhism became more popular.



She worked in the convent but did not take any vows at this time. She gave birth to a son, named Ajari, who she gave up to the nuns. He was raised in the convent and became a monk for the rest of his life.

Living in the convent did not resolve Abutsu's involvement in the world, nor apparently her attractiveness. She began a love affair with a courtier of higher rank; the difference in rank suggests that she probably didn't have much choice in this liaison. She became pregnant again, and the courtier disappeared from her life.

She had to leave the convent and took up residence in a small house on a local mountain, where she lived in poverty for three years while she raised her daughter, named Ki Naishi. Abutsu's later correspondence with this daughter would become an important part of her literary heritage.

Abutsu's time on the mountain passed, and she apparently found comfort in the Buddhism that she had studied. She tells her daughter: "Remember the world is but a fleeting dream and attach yourself not to its fleeting illusions, but endeavor to follow the way of the Buddha." Perhaps she remembered that Buddha said that this life always changes, offering hope that their low fortunes might improve.

THE WAY OF POETRY

In 1252, Abutsu's life changed again—not from her Buddhist prayers, but from her skill in the Way of Poetry. She was commissioned to make a copy of *The Tale of Genji* for the daughter of the famous literary figure Fujiwara no Tameie.

Fujiwara was one of the famous court poets of the day, and he was close to the emperor, serving to compile imperial poetic anthologies. So, he was wealthy and well placed to take Abutsu and her daughter out of their mountain poverty.

In 1252, when Abutsu entered his household, Fujiwara was 54 years old. He had a wife, a son, and a daughter. Very soon, Abutsu became his second wife, and once she had given him two sons, named Tamesuke and Tamemori, she was probably promoted to first wife in the household.

When Abutsu's daughter, Ki Naishi, was six or seven years old, Fujiwara was able to secure her a place at court among the emperor's courtiers. Abutsu had taught her daughter well, for the child captivated everyone with her skill at music. Seven years later, when Ki Naishi was 14, she asked her mother for advice on how to negotiate the complex court, with its jealousies and hierarchy. Abutsu wrote her a response that is called the "Nursemaid's Letter," and it has become a classic work.

Abutsu's advice tells us much about her own experience at court as she tries to guide her daughter. She first emphasizes the practical skills she must learn, and these are the traditional ones that had long marked the court at Kyoto: She was to learn painting, work on her handwriting, cultivate her poetry, and memorize *The Tale of Genji*. More than this, however, Abutsu warned Ki Naishi to hide her feelings. She wrote: "Hide [your] thoughts within your heart and be restrained to succeed. Mask your feelings with a serene exterior."

As it turned out, Ki Naishi was stunningly successful. Following her mother's advice, she caught the emperor's eye and bore him an imperial child.

The eldest of Abutsu's sons by Fujiwara became a Buddhist monk while the younger two devoted themselves to learning the family business of poetry.

Abutsu lived with Fujiwara for more than 20 years, and they jointly worked with poetry and copied enough manuscripts to build up a valuable collection. Fujiwara died in 1275, leaving Abutsu a widow. This is when she took the name Abutsu-ni (Nun Abutsu), by which she is remembered. Now she took the final vows as a nun and shaved her long hair. She donned the simple garb of a nun and planned to live a simple life of poetry and meditation.

Upon the death of Fujiwara, Abutsu wrote a kana prayer called “Memorial for the Repose of His Spirit,” in which she praised his accomplishments and vowed as a widow to spend her life practicing appropriate rituals and austerities, dedicating prayers to Buddha for her husband.

She mourned for a while and continued to educate her younger sons in the Way of Poetry, which had been her husband’s calling and which she wholeheartedly followed. However, practical considerations began to interfere.

Japanese women at this time did not have the same fiscal protections they had once enjoyed. Everything they owned now depended on their husbands and sons.

Fujiwara left a portion of his estate to Abutsu to provide an income for her while she continued the education of their young sons. But he left the bulk of his estate—including his estate in Hosokawa, outside Kyoto, and very valuable manuscript books of poetry—to his eldest son, Tameuji, born of his first wife.

Abutsu objected to the terms of the will that gave everything to Tameuji, leaving little for her sons. She began a lawsuit that would drag on the rest of her life.

Abutsu began her appeal at the court in Kyoto, but the emperor’s ministers found in favor of Tameuji, leaving the will intact. Abutsu decided to appeal to the real center of power—the military ruler in Kamakura. Many women turned to the military tribunal in Kamakura to defend her inheritance rights, but Abutsu was the only one who chronicled her journey in such detail, making her appeal the most famous in medieval Japan.

ABUTSU'S FAMOUS DIARY AND LAWSUIT

In 1279, she set off on her journey to Kamakura. She wrote: "Without foresight I decided to set off led by the moon of the 16th night." During her journey, she began her most famous work: *Diary of the Sixteenth Night Moon*. Because she had devoted her life to the Way of Poetry, she wove lyric poems throughout the diary, making it as much a work of poetry as a travel journal.

In Japan and in Europe, pilgrimage literature was very popular in the 13th century. In Japan, such works were called journals of the path, which gave a Buddhist cast to them.

Abutsu reached Kamakura in the autumn and settled into a house near the mountains by 1280. She hoped to have the shogun hear her case, but international affairs intervened.

The shogun had to defend Japan from invasion by the Mongols that controlled most of Asia. Kublai Khan, the Mongol Chinese emperor, had tried to invade Japan in 1274 and was planning a second major invasion in 1280. The shogun of Kamakura moved to the coast to resist attack; he had no time for inheritance disputes.

On August 15, 1281, Japan was saved by what they considered a miracle. A great typhoon blew and destroyed most of the Mongol fleet, ending the Mongol threat. The Japanese called this a *kamikaze*, or "divine wind."

During World War II, the Japanese looked to a "divine wind" to offer them victory again. This time, they named their suicide pilots kamikaze pilots, hoping again for a miracle.

Abutsu died in 1283, before the lawsuit was decided. Three years later, a verdict was decided against her son Tamesuke, but that did not end the matter. For years, her sons continued their quest, and eventually they prevailed and became the guardians of their parents' literary heritage.

Abutsu was probably buried in Kamakura, and her tomb still stands. But there is a second tomb for her in Kyoto, which also wanted to claim the remains of one of its most famous daughters.

Readings

DeBecker, *Feudal Kamakura*.

Keene, *Seed in the Heart*.

Laffin, *Rewriting Medieval Japanese Women*.

Sho-on, *A Raft from the Other Shore*.

Questions

- 1 How did Buddhism spread into Japan? What kind of Buddhism did the Japanese practice?
- 2 What drew Abutsu to court, and why did she leave?
- 3 Why did Abutsu take vows as a Buddhist?
- 4 Why did Abutsu make a pilgrimage to Kamakura? What was the result of her journey?

BRIGITTA SPEAKS TO GOD AND THE POPE

LECTURE 34

In 1303, a girl named Brigitta was born in luxury in Finsta Castle, near Uppland, Sweden. She was the youngest of seven children. Her father was the governor of Uppland, and Brigitta could have expected to live the life of a pampered noblewoman. However, the 14th century was a terrible one, filled with disasters throughout Europe.





BRIGITTA'S EARLY LIFE

At the beginning, Brigitta's life seemed ordinary as she lived in her castle in Sweden. But her life changed in 1314, when her mother died. Brigitta's father believed the 11-year-old girl needed a woman's hand and sent her to live with her maternal aunt and godmother, Karin Bengtsdotter, who would see to her education.

Visitors to the great manor house at Ulvasa today can see some of the ruins of Brigitta's castle.

Like all medieval noblewomen, Brigitta learned to manage the manor, sew with fine stitches, and read and write. As also was customary, the girl received a Christian education, reading religious works and saints' lives to learn examples of piety. She lived with her aunt for two years until she was 14 years old, when her father arranged a fine marriage for her.

In 1316, she married Ulf Gudmarsson, an 18-year-old prince who took Brigitta to live with him in his castle of Ulvasa, where she spent most of her life.

Brigitta wrote one of the most influential works of mysticism of the 14th century, in which she tried to address the religious and social problems that plagued her world.

THE GREAT FAMINE

Beginning in about 1310, the weather throughout Europe took a serious turn for the worse. A series of years came in which there was too much rain; it was steady from April throughout the summer, making the whole growing season abnormally cool. The storms swept away newly planted seeds and interfered with the harvest. By 1315, famine began and continued in parts of Europe until 1322.

Aching hunger drove peasants from their lands, and noblemen like Ulf were as worried about wandering families as they were about the shortage of food on their tables.

Population density in Scandinavia was low, so there was less pressure on the food supply, but at the same time, these lands in the north were more susceptible to bad weather. So, the people suffered.

Churches all over Europe, including Scandinavia, called for special prayers to improve the weather. To many people, the prayers in the churches seemed to do no good, as crops continued to fail and people grew weaker.

THE AVIGNON PAPACY

Christendom faced an addition problem—what many believed was a disaster—that seemed to make the church unsuitable to address the natural disasters. In 1305, the newly elected Pope Clement V did not go to Rome to take up his position. Instead, he set up a new court in Avignon on the east bank of the Rhône River, where he ruled in the shadow of the powerful French king Philip IV, who had arranged for his election.



Pope Clement V

The pope's absence from Rome posed several problems. First, the pope's claim to lead the church rested on his role as the bishop of Rome; if he wasn't in Rome, was he actually a pope? In addition, his absence from Rome made it impossible for him to collect his traditional taxes from Rome, so he needed another source of income. He needed additional funds to build a new palace in Avignon, which is huge and impressive to visitors even today.

The Avignon papacy—a succession of seven popes from 1309 to 1376—expanded their administration, streamlining and expanding their collection of ecclesiastical taxes to fund their court in Avignon. They also increased the numbers of canon lawyers to reach into the legal cases all over Christendom. To many, it seemed that the church had become all too secular when the world was in desperate need of spiritual leadership.

Brigitta, along with many others in Europe, became preoccupied with the Avignon papacy. It seemed that the church couldn't fix its own problems, much less address the famine and violence that was sweeping the land. Some turned to private prayer, hoping God would listen to them, and Brigitta was among them. She began with a personal renunciation. She persuaded Ulf to hold off on sexual intercourse, probably hoping that this sort of renunciation would please God.

Finally, the couple decided to consummate their marriage to produce an heir for the family's land in Ulvasa. Between 1319 and about 1334, Brigitta bore eight children, and, remarkably for the age, only two died in infancy. The rest were raised to be as pious as their parents. Their second daughter, Catherine, achieved spiritual renown in her own right and was later officially revered as a saint. For these 15 years, Brigitta was preoccupied with bearing and rearing her children. But soon, she was called to court.

PILGRIMAGE TO SPAIN

In 1339, Brigitta persuaded her husband to join her on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela on the coast of northwest Spain, where a great shrine of Saint James had been built. This shrine became a renowned pilgrimage site, attracting hundreds of thousands of pilgrims throughout the Middle Ages, and remains an incredibly popular pilgrimage site today.

In the 9th century, a peasant in Spain had a vision of brilliant stars over a field of precious relics. These are purported to be the bones of Saint James, one of the apostles of Christ who had been killed in Jerusalem in 44 CE. Once the bones had been discovered, a great shrine, called Santiago de Compostela ("Saint James of the Starry Field"), was built to house them.



It was a hard, dangerous journey from Uppland to Santiago; many pilgrims were robbed along the way, and illness was always a hazard. But with her constant view toward improving life in Christendom, Brigitta probably thought that her own difficulties and renunciations might help society.

When the couple reached Santiago, they joined the lines of pilgrims waiting to enter and walk behind the statue of Saint James. They kissed the statue's shoulder to gain his blessing. Then, they turned back to start the arduous journey home.

As they reached Arras in northern France, Ulf became very ill, and it did not appear that he would recover. The couple decided to embrace monastic vows at the end of Ulf's life. They got as far as the Cistercian abbey at Alvastra in Sweden, where Ulf took vows and entered the abbey late in 1342. Because this was a monastery for men, Brigitta took up residence in an adjacent building. Ulf died there in 1344.

While praying at Alvastra in 1345, Brigitta spent a great deal of time meditating on the Passion of Christ and the Compassion of the Virgin. During this time, she had a mystical experience in which she felt Christ—and Mary—communicating directly with her. This became the first of some 600 visions she had during her life. She recorded them in Swedish, but they were translated into Latin, and through this Latin version, her visions spread widely.

The text is known as the *Revelations*, and at the beginning of it, Brigitta articulates her view—shared by many in the 14th century—that the disasters of the age were caused by people's lack of faith.

Believers looked to the biblical Book of Revelation, which promised destruction that seemed to apply to their times. The land had experienced famine, and it continued periodically. There was violent warfare as the Hundred Years' War between France and England swept the continent. Church leadership seemed inadequate, as the pope continued to live in Avignon. All this had brought plenty of death and despair, but in 1347, things got even worse.

In that year, the Black Death swept through Europe, killing from 30 to 50 percent of the inhabitants—20 to 35 million people. It is hard to get firm numbers from the Scandinavian region, where population density was low, but in 1350 in Sweden, many people died and survivors fled the land.

MESSAGES FROM GOD

Brigitta's messages from God were not simply consolation for the mystic; instead, they gave her a call to action—to change the world. As she claimed God told her: "Make the words of my mouth publicly known and bring them personally to the head of the Church."

Brigitta claimed that God in a vision told her to establish an order of monks and nuns dedicated to praying for the Passion of Christ and the Compassion of Mary. One of the unique features of this monastery was that it should be for both men and women (living in separate quarters, of course) and that a woman would be in charge.

Swedish bishops who had come to believe in the validity of her visions persuaded King Magnus to support her new order. He did so by giving her an old castle at Vadstena on the shores of Vättern Lake to be the site of her order.

While she had the ear of the king, she persuaded him that God wanted him to lead a Crusade—that idealized holy war that hadn't been successfully conducted for almost a century. Again, Brigitta turned to an old ideal of the medieval world to rejuvenate religion and society.

Instead of going to the Holy Land, however, she urged him to turn his armies against pagans living in southern Sweden to bring them to the love of God by the sword. He left in 1347 and encountered the plague as he was marching against Novgorod. Illness broke out among his troops, and he was forced to return to Sweden, bringing the plague with him. After this, King Magnus no longer listened to God's word as filtered through Brigitta.



During the years of famine and religious strife in Europe, the political fortunes of Sweden rose. In 1319, King Magnus Eriksson became Magnus IV, king of Sweden, and in the same year, he was acclaimed Magnus VII, king of Norway. The Scandinavian lands were united in a large political force.

Brigitta then turned to the Avignon papacy and began a relentless campaign to have the pope return to Rome. She sent letters and delegations of bishops to carry God's words to him. In this enterprise, she had plenty of support from others in Europe who also saw the Avignon papacy as the cause of much of the distress in the land.

Brigitta planned to go to Rome to await the return of the pope—she was sure he would listen to her eventually. She also needed the pope to authorize her new order. While in Rome, she studied Latin, prayed, and visited famous churches. And she continued to browbeat the pope to return to Rome.

Finally, Pope Urban V bowed to the growing pressure to return to Rome. He arrived there late in 1367 and was the first pope to visit the city in nearly 60 years. While crowds cheered his return, it was very difficult for him. The papal palace was falling apart; Rome's political factions were turbulent, and he could get little support. He could get no access to his supporters (and his money) in Avignon.

After almost three years, he gave up and prepared to return to Avignon. Brigitta managed to get an audience with the pope as he was preparing to depart, and in her anger at his departure, she issued a warning: She told him if he were to leave Rome, he would die. She was right. He left Rome and grew ill and died.

Brigitta was disappointed at the pope's departure, but God offered her a consoling suggestion: She should take a final pilgrimage to the Holy Land. She departed in the early spring of 1372, when she was 69 years old, and reached Jerusalem on May 13, 1372.

She traveled some months in the Holy Land and then took a ship back to Rome. The trip was arduous, as such journeys always were, and when Brigitta reached Rome, she died—on July 23, 1373, at the age of 70. She never reached Sweden, where her convent at Vadstena would become the most important monastery.

Brigitta's writings spread widely and influenced other famous mystics, and several biographies were written by her contemporaries. She was declared a saint in 1391 and became one of the patron saints of Europe in 1999.

Readings

Gronberger, *St. Bridget of Sweden*.

Holloway, trans., *Saint Bride and Her Book*.

Mullins, *The Popes of Avignon*.

Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*.

Questions

- 1 What were the disasters of the 14th century that affected Brigitta's life? How did she respond?
- 2 What was Brigitta's family like? What was her relationship with her husband?
- 3 What was the content of Brigitta's visions?
- 4 Where did Brigitta go on pilgrimage? Why did she go?

JOAN OF ARC DIES FOR FRANCE

LECTURE 35

In 1415, England and France had been at war since 1337 in what has come to be called the Hundred Years' War. The war began, as most medieval wars did, over who would get to be king of France. What started as a standard war between dynasties fought by knights in shining armor would end up being the beginning of modern warfare, in which guns carried the day and national identity—being French or English—began to matter more than what king was in charge. A young woman stood proudly at the turning point of this long, brutal war: She called herself Joan the Maid, but the world remembers her as Joan of Arc (d'Arc being her father's surname).



THE HUNDRED YEARS' WAR

Historians divide the Hundred Year's War into three sections of violence, divided by truces as the exhausted combatants regrouped. The first two phases are called the Edwardian War (from 1337 to 1360) and the Caroline War (from 1369 to 1389).

In 1415, the combatants entered a new violent phase when Henry V, who had just become king of England in 1413, ended a long-standing truce by invading Normandy. His timing was perfect because the powerful duke of Burgundy, whose lands lay on the eastern edge of France, jumped into the fray on the English side so that they could carve up some French lands for themselves.

Henry landed in Normandy in 1415 with a substantial force of knights and about 6,000 archers—English longbowmen instead of the more traditional crossbowmen. The mounted French knights were slaughtered in this famous Battle of Agincourt, and the French would not forget this humiliation.

As the Hundred Years' War raged through France, it was unlike many previous wars, in which soldiers lined up and attacked each other; this war brought devastation to the peasants of the countryside. Many accounts tell of soldiers pillaging peasant farms, searching for valuables to make up their pay, and many manuscript illustrations tell the same tale.

JOAN'S VISIONS

Joan was born in about 1412 in Domrémy, in Lorraine, in northeastern France. Joan was just a toddler when the Battle of Agincourt placed much of northern France in the hands of the English.

Joan's parents were relatively prosperous country people, and her home is visited today by visitors from all over the world.

Joan's village was in one of the last pockets that remained loyal to the French king during the English victories, so the region was raided repeatedly by the English and their allies, the Burgundians. These raids and destruction took place between 1424 and 1428, just when Joan was growing up, and they no doubt had a deep influence on the child.

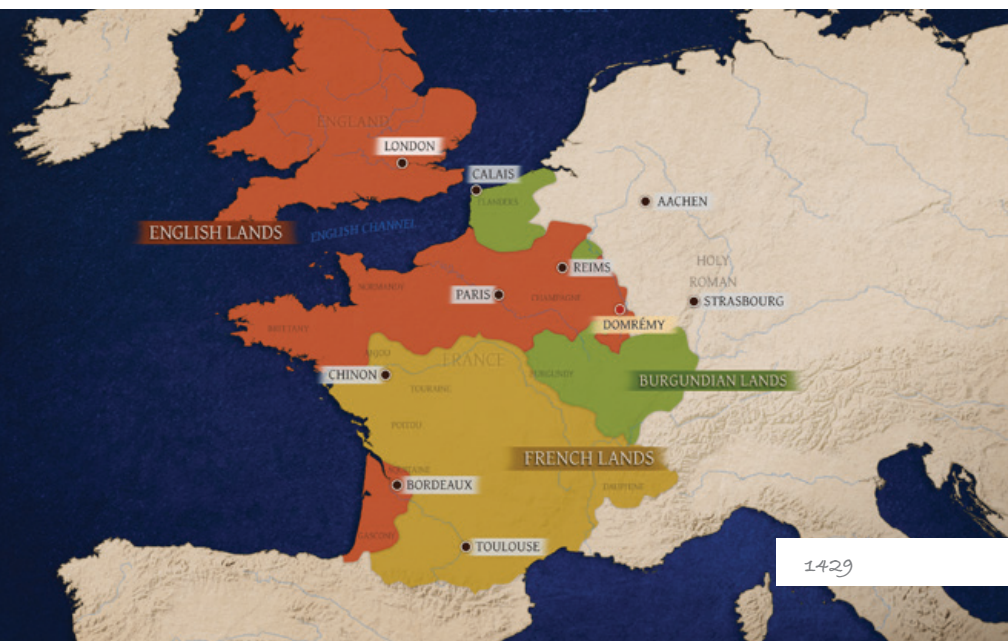
When Joan was about 13, she began to experience visions—she saw lights and heard voices. At first, she was terrified, but later she identified the voices as belonging to the archangel Michael and the saints Catherine and Margaret. These voices persuaded her that she was destined to have Charles, the heir of France, crowned and to liberate France from the English.

The idea of a young girl leading armies to drive the English out of France is so preposterous that if it weren't so well documented, no one would believe it. But this is indeed what happened.

The French king, Charles VI—who became known as Charles the Mad—could not lead France; he suffered from bouts of insanity that left him ineffectual. The English victories forced his queen in 1420 to sign the Treaty of Troyes, which promised the crown of France to the English heir when Charles VI died. This treaty effectively disinherited Charles's heir, who was also named Charles. The heir to the throne of France is traditionally called the dauphin, and that was what people called the young uncrowned Charles.

This treaty also would have created one country comprised of England and France. As it was, in 1429, England controlled all of northern France almost to the Loire River, and the Burgundians had carved out a large swath of eastern France.

Joan's voices told her to help get the dauphin crowned at the traditional city of Reims, which was held by the English. Even she doubted these voices at first because the project seemed implausible, but eventually she took up the cause.



In 1429, she finally persuaded a local garrison commander to escort her to the city of Chinon, the dauphin's headquarters. She wore men's clothing to slip through the enemy's lines. The dauphin gave her armor and allowed her to join an expedition that was going to reinforce the siege of Orléans, where the English were trying to take that strategically located city from the French.

At first, the French soldiers disdained being joined by this young woman in armor, but as they marched the 100 miles from Chinon to Orléans, they developed a grudging respect for her. When the French regained a small fortress about two miles east of Orléans, Joan's reputation as more than a good-luck charm was secured.

Joan carried her standard, or banner, into the thick of battle, which stirred the soldiers to fight for France instead of fighting for just one more feudal king.

When Joan led the French forces into battle, she faced a new kind of warfare that had been introduced at the Battle of Agincourt. During this war, gunpowder came into more use. Artillery pieces and guns appeared on the battlefield, and an army didn't need a handful of heavily armed knights to fight; generals needed larger numbers of common soldiers armed with these new weapons.

Lords hired mercenaries who were called free companies because they fought for money, not loyalty to a lord. This broke down the old feudal system.

Many scholars have called the Hundred Years' War the first modern war, because it involved guns, mercenaries, and devastation to civilians.

Even though Joan was wounded by an arrow above her breast, she led the French in a fierce battle to lift the siege of Orléans. The English withdrew on May 8, 1429, and this victory is still celebrated in Orléans today with a weeklong festival.

The French still had to conquer several more towns to open the way to Reims for Charles's coronation. These battles were facilitated by forceful letters Joan dictated—because she was illiterate—and sent in advance to the towns along the way, calling for their support. It worked.

CHARLES'S CORONATION

On July 17, 1429, Joan escorted the dauphin into Reims Cathedral, where he was crowned King Charles VII of France. She had done what she set out to do; France had a king who was duly crowned in the traditional way, so the Treaty of Troyes that had disinherited the dauphin was effectively undone.

Joan wanted to continue the struggle against the English, who still held so much ground, but it seems that Charles and his advisors no longer trusted her so fully. Her military momentum suffered at this point. She brought an army to retake Paris but failed.

Joan didn't doubt her mission, and through 1430, she continued to dictate letters to supporters, urging them to continue the fight. In these letters, Joan rallied Frenchmen, not just supporters of King Charles. But Charles only gave her command of a token force that included volunteers and mercenaries.

In late April 1430, Joan was campaigning north of Paris. Outside Compiègne, she expected support since this town was favorable to her, but instead, on May 23, 1430, she was captured by the Burgundians, England's allies, outside the city gates.

Knights were held captive all the time during the Hundred Years' War. Captive noblemen were taken into custody and housed nicely in a manor while they waited for their king to pay ransom for them. Then, they would be released to fight again. It was all very civilized.

The Burgundians held Joan, and in a monumental expression of ingratitude, Charles did not ransom her. Instead, the English paid the Burgundians 10,000 crowns (a crown was about an ounce of silver), and Joan was turned over to them, but they were not about to let her go back to the field.

From Compiègne, she was slowly moved to Rouen, where she would stand trial—but for what? There was no “war crime” for soldiers in the 15th century, and this was unprecedented.

When she reached Rouen on December 23, 1430, she was guarded by the soldiers under the earl of Warwick, Richard Beauchamp. He arranged for her to be tried. What court would try her? She had committed no crime, so she could not be charged in criminal court. Instead, they brought charges in the Inquisition—an ecclesiastical court that was designed to examine a prisoner's beliefs.

King Charles reopened Joan's case in 1455, and French inquisitors nullified Joan's verdict on July 7, 1456.

THE INQUISITION

The Inquisition had been established in the mid-13th century to ferret out and eradicate threatening ideas. Unlike secular courts, which determined the guilt or innocence of actions, the Inquisition studied beliefs. Perhaps the only way to understand this attack on differing opinions is to remember that people in the Middle Ages believed that exposure to false religious ideas would jeopardize the salvation of the faithful.

The English who still held Paris and much of northern France wanted Joan's voices to be deemed false visions—from the devil, not from God. If Joan's visions were false, then Charles was not the legitimate king of France, and the English king could inherit his lands. If the Inquisitors could discredit Joan, they could perhaps dissuade her followers from fighting for France. Finally, the medieval church wanted to enforce obedience; Joan was not obedient.

Inquisitors used a number of techniques to trick prisoners into revealing their beliefs. Often, they simply wore people down with endless confusing questions; sometimes they used starvation, imprisonment, and torture to force people to reveal their beliefs.

Many unfortunate victims "confessed" to escape further torture, and although once they confessed they were released, many faced extreme "penances," such as renunciation of property or imprisonment.

Those who were deemed guilty—or those who had confessed and then returned to their original erroneous ideas—were turned over to the secular authority to be executed, usually by burning.

The trial lasted from January 9 until May 23, 1431. It was conducted with procedural rigor, and it left a detailed record of the proceedings. We can read the long questioning, Joan's determination, and the Inquisitors' frustrations.

The Inquisition found her guilty. This was no surprise; they were always bound to do so. They drew up a list of 12 articles of condemnation against her, judging her to be a heretic and a liar. Now the proceedings moved to the next stage: Would she confess and repent? The Inquisition was always bound to let the accused do so because the church had to appear to be forgiving.

Joan was exhausted and weak in jail; she could argue no longer. On May 24, 1431, she signed a document, called an abjuration, denying her belief in her voices. She was returned to jail.

Joan's abjuration infuriated the English because once she confessed, her penance would be light, and they wanted a greater punishment. On her part, Joan felt she had been betrayed by the judges because they'd promised to remove her from the men's prison and give her to the care of women. Days passed as all tried to decide what to do.

On May 28, the judges went to Joan's prison cell and asked if she had heard her voices again. She agreed that she had, adding: "I believe [my voices] come from God."

Joan sealed her fate. The judges then declared that she was a relapsed heretic, disobedient to the church. As was traditional, the Inquisition then turned her over to the secular authorities to implement a capital punishment that would keep Christendom safe from the ideas of Joan the Maid.

On May 30, 1431, Joan was taken to the marketplace at Rouen, where she was tied to a stake surrounded by branches and kindling. She was burned alive. Her ashes were thrown into the Seine to prevent anyone from worshipping relics of her body.



The Hundred Years' War dragged on for another 22 years before ending in 1453, when Charles finally expelled the English from France.



Joan remained a popular symbol for the French and was made a saint in 1920 after soldiers' accounts of visions of her helping them through the horrors of the trenches in World War I.

Readings

Castor, *Joan of Arc*.

Pernond, *Joan of Arc*.

Scott, trans., *The Trial of Joan of Arc*.

Seward, *The Hundred Years War*.

Questions

- 1 What was the Hundred Years' War? Who were the participants?
- 2 What did Joan's visions tell her to do? Was she successful?
- 3 What kind of court was the Inquisition? What charges did they bring against Joan?
- 4 What was Joan's impact on the development of France?

CHRISTINE OF PISAN DEFENDS WOMEN

LECTURE 36

Christine of Pisan is considered the first professional writer of either gender. She wrote more than 40 works that were immediately valued and continue to be read today. In most of her beliefs, Christine was a medieval woman, with a longing for noble kings and a virtuous church, but she lived in the disastrous 14th century, with its plague, famine, the Hundred Years' War between France and England, and a papacy torn between Avignon and Rome. The medieval world order was crumbling to make room for Renaissance ideas, and Christine was a witness to the close of the premodern world. But Christine was not simply an apologist for the past. In two important ways, she pointed to the future: She relied on reason and learning more than God, and she advocated for a new view of women.





THE RENAISSANCE

Central Italy in the 14th century was the birthplace of the new ideas that would come to be called the Renaissance, which introduced individualism—an optimistic idea that individuals could achieve excellence through their own efforts—and realism. The Renaissance urged people to be active and take charge of their world.

Some have called Christine of Pisan the first feminist author.

Of course, people in 14th-century Italy did not know that these ideas would sweep north over the century and introduce the modern age. Instead, there were artists and scholars who lived their lives of individual effort, realism, and activism—and changed the European world.

In Italy, 45 percent of children died before the age of 20, and most were girls.

Even during the Renaissance in Italy, where writers advocated education as the means to achieve excellence, women were not included. Children in general were not to be indulged but to be raised to be tough and competent. And girls were usually treated most harshly.

CHRISTINE OF PISAN

In about 1364, Christine was born in Venice. She had two older brothers, but she was the favorite of her father, Tommaso, who had originally come from the Italian town of Pizzano. Christine came to be called Christine of Pisan, recalling the hometown of her family.

When Christine was about four years old, King Charles V of France hired Tommaso to become the royal physician—which meant scientific advisor and astrologer. The family moved to Paris, where Thomas educated the young girl, teaching her languages and how to read and discuss with him the many volumes in the French king's library. She read works on history and philosophy and theology, mastering classics from Saint Augustine to modern Italian authors like Petrarch and Boccaccio, who were stimulating the new ideas.

Though he defied tradition by educating his daughter, Thomas followed the traditional path by arranging an early marriage for her.

He chose wisely for his daughter. In 1379, when Christine was 15 years old, Thomas arranged for her to marry Etienne du Castel, a young notary who worked as a legal scribe for the court. According to Christine, the marriage was a very happy one. Etienne enjoyed his educated bride, and they had three children. But the family fortunes soon changed for the worse.

The problems began as early as 1380, when Charles V died, just a year after Christine's marriage. The new king, Charles VI, was only 11 years old, and the kingdom was ruled by his three uncles. These dukes squandered the royal treasury for their own benefit and raised taxes. All this was happening while the Hundred Years' War was raging in France.

In medieval times, people stayed in place, linking their destinies to the land they were born on and to the lord they served. But Tommaso, like many others in the 14th century, moved to improve his position. This movement of families and individuals to search for better employment was a mark of the transition from the premodern age.

Christine writes that her mother disapproved of her education, thinking it inappropriate for a girl, but for the rest of her life, Christine was a strong advocate of education for women.

Thomas, the royal astrologer, found no supportive patron among these royal dukes, and his fortunes fell as he acquired debts to try to keep his family solvent. The royal situation changed in 1388, when Charles VI was finally able to wrest power from his corrupt uncles. He restored his father's advisors and improved the fiscal conditions. For this, he was briefly called Charles the Well-Beloved by his grateful subjects. His restorations may have included his father's astrologer, Thomas, but it was too late. Thomas died in 1389, leaving many debts.

Christine's husband died shortly thereafter from the periodic plague that continued to sweep through Europe. Christine was a 25-year-old widow and sole support for her mother, her three children, and a niece.

Her two brothers abandoned the family to return to Italy, but Christine remained in Paris, the city she had come to love. For the first few years of her widowhood, she mourned her husband and endured constant legal battles to fend off creditors trying to reclaim Thomas's debts.

The king was in no position to become her patron, because in 1392, he went mad in the woods, killing four of his knights and almost killing his brother. After that, he experienced periodic bouts of madness—and from then on, his subjects called him Charles the Mad. Christine and others would watch as this king and his advisors continued to lose the Hundred Years' War and effectively disinherit his son the dauphin (who would later be led by Joan of Arc into Reims to be crowned king).

CHRISTINE'S NEW CAREER

The court was in disarray, France suffered under warfare, and Christine was burdened by debt. Astonishingly, she turned to her education, and in the best Renaissance manner, she figured out how to not only survive, but to thrive.

In around 1394, she completed a series of lyric poems called *One Hundred Ballads*, which spoke poignantly of her losses, her love for her husband, and her painful solitude. These works resonated with powerful people in the court, who purchased copies of the works. She now embarked on a new career as an author, and she pursued it with courage, vigor, and lots of talent.

Christine, like medieval writers before her, wrote many works on commission for wealthy patrons, but she also did something new: She hired copyists and illuminators (that is, illustrators who paint on the page) to make multiple copies of her works so she could sell them more widely.

Once the printing press was in wide use, Christine's works were among the early books to be printed and circulated.

Christine's works were also distinctive in that she conceived of the illustrations to accompany her works. Hildegard of Bingen also described her visions to her illuminator, but Christine's works were the first in the vernacular language (not Latin) to offer illustrations. Fortunately, these illustrations are beautifully preserved.



POLITICAL VISION

All of Christine's political works were written within the context of the Hundred Years' War and the internal divisions within France that took place during this terrible time. All urge virtue among rulers that will bring peace and order to the land. The first of these was *The Book of the Deeds and Good Practices of the Wise King Charles V*, a biography designed to teach the king's son to rule wisely.

Christine wrote other political treatises as well; the major ones include *Moral Teachings*, *Moral Proverbs*, *The Book of Peace*, and *The Book of the Body Politic*. In all of these, she draws from historical and philosophical works to urge people to a virtuous life that would yield a peaceful state.

A final political work that remained greatly influential was Christine's *Book of Deeds of Arms and of Chivalry*. This was a treatise on war, and Christine drew from previous Latin treatises on warfare, claiming to bring the wisdom of the ancients to French speakers.

There is something profoundly new in Christine's political writings. She does not appeal to God as the source of her advice; instead, she looks to learning and reason for her guidance.

Her political vision might be one looking backward to a virtuous medieval kingdom, but the source of her preaching comes from the Italian Renaissance that is just beginning to show its influence: Human reason can lead to just as virtuous a life as God can.



WRITINGS ON WOMEN

Christine's writings on women show the clearest break with the medieval past. Early in her writing career, she tackled the tradition of romantic love that had been fostered by Eleanor of Aquitaine and Marie of Champagne and embraced by poets and nobles alike.

The joys of seduction and the game of romantic love had become well established in the medieval lexicon. These values reached their fullest and most popular expression in the *Romance of the Rose*. This is a very long poem in French that tells of an allegoric dream vision giving instruction on how to seduce a lady and ends with the consummation of the seduction.

Early in her career, beginning in about 1401, Christine wrote a series of letters that have been collected as the *Debate of the Romance of the Rose*. She was angered by Parisian humanists' love of the poem, and she engaged them in a vigorous literary debate. She argued that such poems advocating seduction served only to vilify women; as she put it, the romantic love tradition suggested that "all you women are, will be, or have been, in deed or intention whores." Instead, she looked to her own happy marriage and her own satisfying family life to attack the medieval game of love.

Her support of women in these letters led her to write her most enduringly popular work: *The Book of the City of Ladies*. This work—which some modern women have embraced as feminist—was bold and ambitious.

The Book of the City of Ladies is available in accessible translations.

Christine describes poignantly what led her to write this long work: "[I] wonder how it happened that so many different men—and learned men among them—have been and are so inclined to express ... so many wicked insults about women and their behavior."

And like so many women before and since, she remembers how she took on men's ideas of women: "As I was thinking this, a great unhappiness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature."

This book is organized around the accomplishments of women, and within each category, Christine lists some famous women from the past. She concludes the book by urging women to embrace the virtues that are innate within them: "[S]ee how men accuse you of so many vices in everything. Make liars of them all by showing forth your virtue, and prove their attacks false by acting well."



Christine spent most of her life in love with the classics and history and philosophy. Later in her life, she turned to God. She began to write works of Christian consolation and prayers, and as the Hundred Years' War dragged on, she seems to have turned increasingly to prayer.

Christine grew more and more despondent about the war in France. She wrote "The Epistle of the Prison of Human Life" as an attempt to console the widows of the disastrous Battle of Agincourt, in which so many French knights died. Many historians have written about this famous battle, but only Christine noted the devastation it caused at the home front to families left behind.

Finally, in about 1418, she withdrew to live in the convent at Poissy, where her daughter was a nun. She lived quietly there until 1429, when she heard of the victories of Joan of Arc, who seemed to be a fulfillment of her hope that virtuous women would help restore the French monarchy.

Christine wrote her final poem—"The Song of Joan of Arc"—shortly after the crowning of Charles VII. This is an important poem because it is the only work written about Joan during her lifetime. Fortunately, Christine didn't live to hear about Joan's trial and execution; instead, she died in about 1430 believing that a young girl had saved the France she had come to love.

Readings

Adams, *Christine de Pizan and the Fight for France*.

Altman and McGrady, *Christine de Pizan*.

de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*.

Willard, *Christine de Pizan*.

Questions

- 1 How did Christine come to be called the first professional author?
- 2 In what ways did Christine represent the new ideas of the Renaissance? In what ways did she advocate older medieval ideas?
- 3 What were Christine's main writings?
- 4 Why is Christine sometimes called the first feminist?

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